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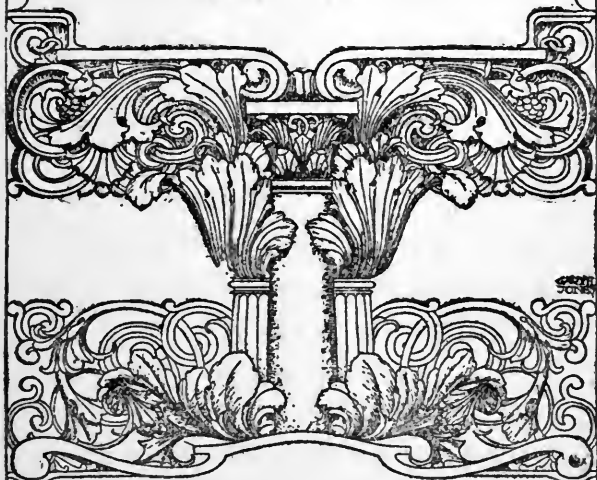
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THE RED REAPER

BY
JOHN A. STEUART

AUTHOR OF
"THE ROCK OF THE RAVENS"
"THE WINE ON THE LEES" ETC.



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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PROEM

LET them say what they will, the die was cast when my lord kissed the king's hand at Berwick. Certain people of the Iago stamp, oily, subtle, intent to entangle, would have gasped, half in chagrin, half in glee, had they beheld that kiss, and yet more the look of tender appeal and quick response which went before.

My lord's eyes shone with a sudden flux of loyalty ; the king's smiled graciously, wooingly, and a trifle sadly, as was their wont. To one ever apt in understanding they said unmistakably, "I wronged thee ; but that was because I was deceived and misled. Forgive and come back. I have need of thee." All the ineffable grace and fascination of Charles Stuart were in that penitent, beseeching look. My lord's heart leaped forth on the instant. The past was blotted out. Coldness, neglect, disdain, fatuity, were forgotten. The king was in trouble, the king, with eyes of trust and affection, was imploring aid. It was enough.

The king, in truth, was in dire straits ; for the game he had played, for some two years now, was grown hot and hard and desperately grim. But a short month had passed since the Scots army, twenty thousand strong, lay on the slope of Dunse Law, truculently looking across the Tweed at the English tents, a sight to wring a monarch's heart.

In the radiant summer weather the Scots encampment gleamed bravely enough on the fair Dunse Law.

"The white pavilions made a show,
Like remnants of the winter snow
Along the dusky ridge."

The commander was Alexander Leslie, "the old,

little, crooked soldier," field-marshal of Gustavus Adolphus, common pikeman that was, Earl of Leven that was to be, comrade in arms of Montrose. With him were many famous Scots lords, Rothes, Loudon, Lindsay, Cassillis, Kircudbright, Dalhousie, and others, come forth to try odds with their king. At every captain's tent door a new colour flew with the Scottish Arms emblazoned and this notable ditton, *For Christ's Crown and Covenant*, fittingly in letters of gold. Crown and Covenant ; they symbolised all.

My lord was not among the bonnets and blue ribbons on Dunse Hill, having ridden north post haste to draw Gordon blood at Brig o' Dee and elsewhere, take, retake and fine the heretic city of Aberdeen, and withal save it from the devouring fury of his divines, a leniency never forgiven. "Ought to have put it to the sword and reduced it to ashes," said the Committee of Estates. For what is victory if not for vengeance ?

The Treaty of Berwick brought a temporary sheathing of swords before he could display his banner on Dunse Hill. But he was one of the company of nobles who presently conferred with his Majesty concerning tumults of women, pelting of bishops, and other grim sport of a distempered people. Rothes, whose canniness first "brought in" my lord, was there as chief spokesman, insolently familiar, sly, unctuous, obstinate, an ambassador to turn a king's stomach.

The conference ended, my lord looked in the king's face and read the thoughts behind like an open book. In that moment his decision was made, his fate sealed. He took his leave with the rest ; but at midnight he was back alone, kissing the king's hand on bended knee.

The ambrosial summer night was lustrous with stars and rich with perfume when he came forth again, his heart aflame. In the silence of the night, none seeing him, he lifted his face to the glimmering host of heaven, and on drawn sword took a great oath, "*I live and die for Loyaltie.*"

CHAPTER I

FRIEND OR FOE?

For weeks the Atholemen's hearts stirred rapturously over tales of fire and sword in the west, raids, burnings, harryings, rapine and revenge at their fiercest and deadliest. But though the ravaging of Argyle was sweeter than the fruit of a hundred forays, it could not atone for the insolence of the events now impending. Who was Colkitto to come strutting in war array to the menace of the high red blood of Athole? A landless Islesman with a band of tattered, kinless Irishry! By steel and lead he should speedily repent of his arrogance.

At the news of his approach, brought by distracted herdsmen in panic from the hills, messengers were despatched to inquire concerning his present purpose and future intentions. But before they reached him his own couriers were out with the summons which was answered by the fiery cross. It came at a time of exceeding hardship and inconvenience. Harvest was on hand, the roofs demolished in a late foray of the Campbells had to be rebuilt against the winter snows; and worst of all, weapons were mostly to forge. For Argyle had made a clean sweep of all that his hungry clan could lift.

Yet for all that Colkitto's presumption was not to be tolerated. The chiefs of Athole and Strathday would see an upstart Macdonald in cinders before de-meaning themselves to serve under him. Young Will Murray of Tullibardine, who had a sword to his hand long before he got a beard to his face, was for the decisive measure of chopping off the aggressor's head.

"We consider and temporise too much," he cried

passionately. "Oh, for the sight of him we are waiting for! He was to be with us before the corn was in the ear, and now it is yellow for the sickle."

"The Macdonald speaks of a letter from the Marquis," said a returned messenger.

"Let him exhibit it then," retorted Murray hotly. "Let him send it to us. It will serve him better than all the impudent speeches and proclamations he could make between this and doomsday."

"I made bold to tell him as much," responded the messenger, a cadet of the great house of Robertson.

"And what said he?" asked his chief, the Tutor of Struan.

"His answer was that inasmuch as the Marquis's message was for him alone he would not have his honour smirched by having his word doubted."

"His word!" repeated Murray scornfully. "When did the word of a Macdonald of the Isles become enough for Athole, Struan, and Strathtay, to say nothing of Mearn and Angus? By my faith, Lord Ogilvie and the gentlemen of the shires would relish that morsel of effrontery. I would to Heaven we had three hundred stout fellows to guard yonder pass. It were well, methinks, to make the musket discourse to this fellow Colkitto, or he and his Irishry disport themselves in the pleasantries of Blair Castle. But hark!" he cried with a start. "It is already too late. Is not yon the sound of his chanter on the wind?"

"It is the Macdonald quick-step," replied an Athole piper, giving ear.

"And what is to be the Athole welcome?" demanded Murray. "Strike up, strike up. If we cannot give them dirks let them have music."

So when Alastair Macdonald with his company of Badenoch men arrived (having outmarched the weary, footsore Irish) he found the Athole pipers blowing as for a chief's wedding festival.

"This is handsome," says he, when salutations were exchanged, cordially enough on his side, coldly and grimly on the other. "I always heard the Athole pipers were pretty fellows."

"Why, you see it is not every day we have the honour of receiving Alastair Macdonald," returned the Tutor of Struan drily.

"And bearing the king's commission," said Colkitto, cocking his head proudly. Vanity was ever his fault, as of his whole clan, though none will deny it stood him well when blood had to be spilt.

"And that same is a great matter," said Struan, pulling his bonnet tighter over his brows as though to intimate that the word of a Macdonald was by no means a royal decree.

"Yes," pursued Colkitto, drawing himself up and looking hard at the Tutor. "His Majesty's command and Montrose's to call Athole to arms. And, gentlemen, let me remind you that I have made great haste to reach you, biding for neither bite nor sup. The king's enemies are out and busy."

"Did you fall in with any of them?" asked the Tutor.

"A pretty question, as I live," laughed Colkitto loudly. "Did I fall in with any of them? Did Eve of blessed memory fall in with Satan? I tell you it is God's truth I have been most scurvily used by the knaves. 'Tis a hungry, frowsy, itchy clan, the Campbell, but I warrant they were well scratched ere we parted. Not an ill place for victuals, that land of Lorn, if a man have acquired the art of helping himself; but the folk—as true as you are on two legs, Struan—they are savages and cut-throats. What must our friend of the squint do but have my poor ships burnt behind me. Well, his back quarters were well slashed for that. Again, in Glen Spey, where I fain would have rested my men, the Grants with the scabby Frasers and Forbeses were for swallowing us alive. So that I had no peace, but must jouk and double like a hunted hare."

"Methought you would have charged like a lion," said young Murray, his nose in the air.

"And been speared like a wild boar," returned Colkitto. "That were indeed to do the king a service."

"To fight and be killed is sometimes the best service a brave man can render," was the meaning rejoinder.

"Ay," said Colkitto, a sudden peculiar light in his black eyes. "Then it surprises me to find the valorous Mr. Will Murray still to the fore. Gentlemen," he went on, turning with a sweep to the seniors, "this is not just the kind of civility I maybe expected, coming on the king's business. But have it your own way. If any gentleman here present thinks my hand has been slack in striking I am ready to receive proof of his better mettle."

"That is soon given," returned Murray, his hand on the basket hilt of his sword.

Colkitto cast him a contemptuous look. "I needn't have come so far to fight with a boy," was the response.

"Try the boy," retorted Murray fiercely.

"Tush, tush, gentlemen," said Struan, stepping between them. "Is this a time for private quarrels? Bethink you that every minute is more precious than gold?"

"Truly," replied Colkitto, with unruffled coolness, "we have but to prolong these present courtesies a short while to be heartened by the squeal of the Campbell pipes. It sticks in my mind that Gillespie Gruamach and his people have a particular fondness for this fat land of Athole. Did I not hear they were with you in the spring season, doing as they pleased wherever there was a cow to lift, a wall to pull down, a stack to fire, or a weapon to seize? The streets of Inverary and the hillsides of the west ring with the boasting of it to-day."

"It is true," returned Struan sorrowfully, yet with a certain impressive dignity, "that our hereditary foemen, coming upon us in overwhelming force, robbed and despoiled us as you say. We are even now, as your eyes may tell you, trying to repair the loss, to replace our broken roofs, rebuild our tumbled walls, and provide food against the coming of winter. Sir, we have wives and children to house and feed, and do you come making a gibe of our misfortunes?"

A murmur of angry approval rose at these words. Colkitto was quick to take his cue.

"Thane of Struan," he said, bowing magnificently, "I make no gibe of aught so natural and so entirely honourable. Tut, think you Alastair Macdonald knows nothing of the things that hang at men's heart-strings in war time? But your friend, the Murray here, took me somewhat sharply, besides seeing fit to blow a bit on my courage, a poor thing it may be in some folk's eyes, but dear to me as the breath of my nostrils."

"No one doubts your courage," returned Struan soothingly. "Do we not all know that the Judas of Argyle has cause both to regret and curse it? Be assured no man in Athole calls it in question or means you any discourtesy."

"I am as yet but a novice in Athole manners," returned Colkitto. "But truly in my view 'tis a somewhat odd civility that would spit you out of kindness."

"We waste time," said Struan impatiently.

"Proclaim it from all your hilltops," assented Colkitto. "Yet even in our present haste I take leave to submit that a man would as soon have his beard pulled as his valour doubted. I will not weary you by saying what I expected. Let it suffice that for my present coming I have the authority of his Excellency the Marquis of Montrose. And since what must be done were better done quickly, in the name of his Majesty King Charles I hereby summon to my aid all lieges capable of bearing arms. Will the Thane of Struan, who, I perceive, commands here, have the goodness to bring in his men with all convenient speed and instruct the other gentlemen now with us to do likewise? And God save the King!"

At that the bonnets were doffed, but they were instantly replaced and, as it seemed, drawn more tightly over darkening brows.

"The call comes unexpectedly," said Struan. "You will deem it no incivility if I consult for a moment with my friends here before answering."

"None," returned Colkitto; "none whatever," and he turned aside indifferently whistling a bar of an Irish air.

"It is something of an undertaking," said the Tutor, when the hasty conference was over. "And it would greatly aid us all with our men if you were pleased to exhibit his Majesty's commission."

"Why?" replied Colkitto, colouring darkly. "We are back to our doubts again. You, Struan, and the friends about you need no word of mine to remind you all of the consequences of refusal when his Majesty's affairs are in danger."

"At least you will declare your plans," urged the Tutor. "In the present condition of things in Athole it behoves us to act with knowledge and caution."

"But not, I hope, with cowardice," was the retort.

"Cowardice!" repeated the Tutor. "That word sounds strangely in our ears. And indeed, like yourself, we like not to have our courage blown upon. Tell me this, Alastair Macdonald, when was the king in need and we held back? or the enemy attacking him and we stood with arms folded and swords sheathed? Do you come thinking to make us brave by calling us cowards? Sir, I take leave to tell you the plan is perilous."

Colkitto shrugged his shoulders. "I have fed on peril so long that I scarce know the taste of other fare," he said. "If it please you to have it so, be it so. You are all brave and pretty men in Athole here. Ah!" he cried all at once, "yonder come my bonnie Antrim lads. Since private talks and consultations are the fashion before cavaliers will adventure upon a little broil and spulzie, by your leave I too will confer with my friends. Till we meet again I wish you an hour of profitable meditation."

With that he made a sweeping bow, doffing his bonnet ironically, ordered his Badenoch pipers, who were Gordons, to strike up, and went off briskly to the tune of "Cock of the North."

In less than an hour he was back again, his ragged, unkempt regiments at his back, glowering like half-starved wolves. In an open space hard by Blair Castle he halted them.

"Now," says he, "for meat and drink if they are to be found within the bounds of Athole."

When a conference to consider plans and conditions was proposed to him by Struan, he excused himself on the plea of having to look to hungry, dead-weary men.

"A few fat beasts," he intimated, "would be a token of goodwill they are in a mighty humour to enjoy. Certes, we have had more pike points, barred doors and black looks since entering this land of Scotland than has entirely agreed with our health. And now when we reach this pleasant land of Beulah you would give us the old fare over again. Fie, fie, since they looked on Colonsay or the glens of Antrim my eyes have not fallen on a fairer resting-place than this same Castle of Blair, which methinks a little skill might easily convert into a most excellent leaguer."

He turned to his followers, a new expression in his face. "What is it to be?" he asked, as though their will were his law.

"To the Castle!" was the instant and thunderous response. "To the Castle!"

"In the king's name," said Colkitto.

"For King Charles," roared a thousand throats. Whereupon the whole body began to move.

"You see," said Colkitto, turning to Struan, "the poor lads are not to be held back. Ach, they are hungry. For friendship's sake do me the honour of supping with me to-night, and you, Grandtully, and you, young Murray, who promise to be a cavalier of much fame, and the other gentlemen of blood and valour here assembled."

And raising his plumed bonnet he passed on, smiling at the dark, fierce faces bent on him.

CHAPTER II

DEFIANCE

HE could not be prevented from taking possession ; but he had not supped when the outraged Atholemen resolved to make a great feast for the eagles. It seemed unnatural for king's friends to arm against king's friends, but the pride and presumption of Colkitto were more than Highland chiefs could bear. Let the offender and his wretched Irish look to it if the sword had to be drawn.

By midnight the nearer glens were in a tumult of preparation. Before the second day ended the clansmen from Tilt to Tay, from Glengarry to Glenfalloch here hurrying to the rendezvous. Women and children must ply the sickle and replace stone upon stone the razed wall, and pull heather for the thatching, and tend what cattle escaped the marauding Campbells ; ay, and bethink them the while of the wail of new-made widows and orphans. Yet for all the loss and agony of war feminine hands were eager in making ready ; and many a Lochaber axe, many a dirk and claymore owed its sweet edge to the militant zeal of a woman.

By evening on the third day the clansmen were assembled, and a brief council of war was held. What punishment should be meted out to Colkitto ?

" Let his life answer for it if he go not immediately forth and quit the boundaries of Athole," said young Murray, and claimed the honour and peril of bearing the message. " And if I return not within an hour," he added, " I know I shall be well avenged." A great hoarse shout was his assurance that he had judged correctly.

Macdonald received the message with an affectation of extreme politeness, astonishment and pain.

"What!" he cried in a voice of reproach, "am I no better than a thieving Campbell that they send me a message like this? What would my cousin Antrim say? What would Huntly say? How would the Marquis of Montrose look at it? Nay, I ask you what would the king think of the Atholemen if he knew this? Go back, sir, go back and tell them I am here on his Majesty's business."

"They have already heard that from your own lips," returned Murray curtly.

"Body o' me, do they think then I am a dealer in fables?" rejoined Colkitto, his tone suddenly hardening. "Or is it their notion that I and my men came by hill and bog, in wet and hunger, just for the frolic of the thing, and are ready to skip off again at the waving of a hand, like jugglers at a fair? They put me to the need of taking possession of this Castle for the king, without leave given, as you'd say, a thing that went clean against my stomach; and now they would have me prove a traitor or a fool by yielding my advantage at the first taste of their displeasure. When was it Alastair Macdonald's way to slink off like a whipped hound from the hand of a ghillie? They must think well of him who expect him to show his heels so readily."

He smiled grimly, his hard black eyes bent on Murray. "There's another thing I must whisper in your ear," he went on. "That I never found a lodging more precisely and particularly to my taste than this beautiful Castle of Blair. Why, Murray, I tell you they understood things who built and plenished it. Look you, sir, here are elegancies for which a rough man of war like myself is much beholden at a time like this. Last night, while I supped at my case in the great hall, my pipers made most comforting music for me. It wanted nothing but my friends to cap the happiness; and they would not break bread with me. Murray, I take that unkindly."

"I must remind you," was the reply, "that I

brought a plain message, and am waiting for a plain answer."

"Why, and it's not every gospel that's as true as that," said Colkitto, taking his chin in his hand as if considering. "The message, as you say, is plain; impossible to mistake the message. But hark you, Murray," he went on, peering through drawn eyelids at his visitor. "As between message and answer, you'll mind the old saying that he that speaketh is one, and he that giveth ear is another. 'Tis a mighty difference, as the wren said to the eagle in comparing sizes. I will tell you a secret, Murray. I have been taking a look round this pleasant leaguer, and it's God truth I know not where to find a better. Here is all a reasonable man can want, keep, dungeons, barricadoes and what not, not to mention good full larders, all in a most proper order and regularity. As a man of sound understanding, will you tell me wherefore I should quit? Tut, they misjudge me who think I came to see my friends only to run away from them like a base thief."

"I must remind you again that I am waiting for your answer," said Murray.

"Faith," and I am well reminded," was the response. "Now, as between you and me, if I was to clap you in one of the fine rooms down below," tapping on the floor significantly with his foot, "would that, think you, be a plain enough answer to your plain message?"

"Be assured," replied Murray, drawing himself up undauntedly, "that if, contrary to all rules of war, you offer me either insult or injury, you shall live to repent it."

Colkitto threw back his head with a great satirical laugh. "In good faith, my friend, I might die without repenting it," he rejoined. "'Tis a time of little leisure for repentance with some of us. Repent, heh! What with this rudeness and that, an ambuscade here, a furious onset there, and even the king's friends shaking their steel in my face, would you have me on my marrow-bones like a frightened penitent? Why, sir, I take leave to say I am neither a priest nor a terrified old wife."

"We can scarcely agree by argument," said Murray. "The men yonder who sent me are impatient."

"Faith, and 'tis an itch I have often been troubled with," was the bland reply. "But during these latter months in this dear land of my fathers, I have been much employed in learning wisdom. There is nothing in this world better for a man than to know when he is content. Let well enough alone, say I. Now, as I have already told you, I find myself marvellously well pleased with this Castle of Blair. Another thing, my men are at their rest and their victuals. They have supped but sparsely of late. Would you have them up and off before they had well tasted the Athole milk and honey? You see how I am getting rid of impatience. Believe me, Murray, 'tis a disease of youth and inexperience."

"You trifle with me, sir," said Murray, the quick flame mantling his cheek. "Do I understand that you refuse to surrender this Castle which you have most unjustly seized?"

"How the colt gallops!" observed Colkitto, whereat some of his officers laughed, making Murray's cheeks flame the brighter. "I meant but to say," Colkitto pursued lightly, "that things being as they are, I am mighty well content with my present condition. I hope Struan, Stewart of Strathtay, Murray the younger of Tullibardine," here he made a mocking bow, "and the other stout and valiant knights and cavaliers assembled in Athole will not push me too sorely. I would be loath to shed blood."

"You refuse, then?" said the other haughtily. "Be it so. I can but report your answer. Have the goodness then, if you please, to grant me free conduct through your lines."

Colkitto looked at him in a kind of uncertainty, as if swaying between anger and amusement. "Murray," says he then in a low voice, "is it to be blows?"

"I can only say that I have delivered my message and got my answer," was the reply.

Colkitto put on an air of grievance, like one mightily misused. "Why, now, look you," he cried, "if I am

obliged to defend the king's cause where I thought a thousand swords would be leaping to his aid, I call all here present to witness that my hands are clean of the crime of seeking bloodshed. You force me, Murray. Take note that I am forced."

"I will faithfully report what you tell me," Murray answered, "And now I crave permission to return to my friends."

Colkitto was silent a moment, his gaze concentrated and dangerous. It was little his habit to stand upon ceremony with those who were against him. His first impulse was to deal according to his wont with this audacious youngster, who was to the hardened man of war as the stripling David to Goliath. But for once policy mastered passion.

"Being in need of air I will myself see you forth," he said, with well-feigned friendliness. "I am a sea-bird, Murray; a sea-bird that pants for a whiff of wind."

Outside he stood a little while gazing at the circle of hills. "How softly the mountains dream in the evening sun," he said, as if lost in admiration. "Sir, there is a scene fit for one of our own Highland bards to celebrate in his best fashion. Saw you ever aught fairer than the red glint of yonder heather? 'Tis of richer hue than we get on our wind-blown hills of the sea. And look you aloft, crest after crest ablaze as with fire. And think of this, somewhere below is Argyle, with three thousand well-fed men, their weapons of the best, advancing while the king's friends bicker. I tell you, Murray, this business lies heavy on my heart. Here are you and the rest of them at my throat, every man of you itching to get his dirk in first—and why?"

"Is there need to ask?" returned Murray.

"A fair reply," said Colkitto. "Well, God be praised, I have not yet learned to deny my king. No, sir, I am not of the clan of Peter. Tell them that, Murray, tell them that, and ask them, if it please you, what it would profit them to spike my chopped head on the forefront of Blair Castle for Athole daws to peck at? Fie, fie, the thought of our quarrelling fills me with shame."

"You may end it all by delivering up this Castle you have seized," said Murray.

Colkitto's eyes twinkled. "Murray," says he, "when the claymores are flashing, by Heaven I could wish no better man than yourself by my side, for it's through the fire or die with you. 'Tis a pretty gift, and I honour you for it. But concerning the surrender of this Castle, you may have found out that it's somewhat easier letting the grip go than getting it again. Alastair Macdonald's compliments and duty to the gentlemen who sent you, and say that as he has never learned how to surrender, he humbly hopes they will not expect him to take lessons now."

"I will convey your refusal," said Murray, and bowing bonnet in hand, strode off.

Colkitto watched a moment, his eyes flashing, his lips clenched. "There goes an eaglet with sharp claws," he said, turning to his officers. "It seems we are to try the colour of Atholemen's blood. 'Twill be brave sport; for it were less honourable to fight three louts of clan Diarmid, with Argyle himself at their back, than one red-shanked Stewart or Robertson left to his own devices. To your defences, and let not a rogue of them pass the outer gate alive."

CHAPTER III

THE WHETTING OF SWORDS

MEANTIME the Atholemen were busy and excited. Through the stifling August night the camp hummed with preparations for the fight, with conferences, hurrying to and fro, muffled commands, and all the suppressed commotion of impending battle. The Castle lay a black, silent mass, without torch, without sound or sign of life. Colkitto and his men might be sleeping the deep sleep of perfect peace and security.

"He keeps dark and quiet," said an Atholeman, looking in vain for any movement in the Castle.

"Ay," replied another. "But take care of the wolf that crouches in the dark."

The Athole camp was pitched a furlong or two north of the Castle, and for an hour before daybreak the men rested on their arms, all except Struan, for whom there was neither ease nor sleep. Stealing forth alone he ascended a knoll whence there was a wide view southward through the valleys of Tummel and Tay, by Dunkeld and Perth, the bonnie St. Johnstone of song. Would to God, he prayed silently, that somebody would come and come quickly. Why did he tarry? or would he never come?

Turning with a heavy heart the Athole commander walked slowly back. He would fain have avoided this conflict with Colkitto, a man of great and desperate deeds. His hesitation was due to no lack of courage, for among many brave men there did not breathe a braver than the Tutor of Struan, chief of the martial clan of Dundonachie or Robertson. But he thought of

blazing Athole homesteads, ay, and worse, of a king's cause trampled in the dust because the king's adherents could not pocket their pride and keep their temper.

Meanwhile a momentous event was happening at the Castle. In the very moment when Struan stood gazing south in an anxiety verging on despair, a challenge from one of Colkitto's sentries suddenly broke the silence. At that, two figures drew up in the darkness, hastily whispering together. The next instant, answering the sentry's challenge with an assurance of peace, one of them advanced, requesting to be told whether Alastair Macdonald and the men of Antrim lay in the Castle.

"Who is it that asks?" demanded the sentry, keeping his musket levelled.

"One who craves a private word with the commander if he be within," replied the stranger in a low voice.

Thereupon an Irish officer, stepping forward, answered: "There be many men in Athole this night who would fain have that same private word. A light," he cried, "that we may see what manner of man he is who thus comes seeking admittance."

"There are two of us," said the stranger politely. "You had better see us both. Come forward," he added, turning to his companion. "Now, sir," addressing the officer, "be pleased to satisfy yourself."

The officer took the torch into his own hand, flashing it into their faces and up and down their persons repeatedly and deliberately, as if noting every line and button of their dress. He understood at once they were no common men of the mountains. One was in full Highland garb, that is to say the saffron shirt, the *breacan feile* or belted plaid secured on the shoulder with a silver brooch, the short slashed coat and the buskins, leaving the leg bare from thigh to ankle. The second, who seemed to be chief, was also in the habit of the Gael, save that he wore the Tartan truis, or long hose; in addition to the plaid, shirt and Tartan jacket. This, as the dress of the Scoto-Irish, made the officer pause in wonder. For plume both men had a rip of oats in their bonnets, and for arms they carried broadsword and pistol.

"Whence come ye?" asked the officer in evident perplexity.

"A long, tedious march," answered the foremost. "And as we bear tidings of the gravest importance, we crave immediate audience of your leader. If it please you, therefore, have the goodness to conduct us to him."

"There be two words about that, my friend," was the response. "No, no. My orders are to let no man from without pass in alive; and my present humour is to obey."

"In faith then, sir," was the good-natured rejoinder, "we have no wish to put you to any such test of duty as your words imply. We are poor fellows who would live. Nevertheless it is important to all within this Castle that we be admitted."

"Thou hast the virtue of persistence," said the officer. "But first tell me are there any behind?"

"In warlike force we are even as you see us," was the reply. "Two against a garrison of valiant men proved in war."

"And you would win with a compliment," laughed the officer drily. Then turning he ordered up a sergeant and file of men. "Disarm these two," he said, "and lead them in to the general. And you," he told another man, "go forward at once and apprise him of their coming. Say they have tidings of importance which they would commit to himself alone."

Meanwhile the strangers, having exchanged a look of intelligence, quietly delivered up their arms.

"I am glad to see so zealous an officer on guard," said he who appeared to be leader. "We surrender our arms and hold ourselves prisoners at your command."

Thus disarmed and guarded they were led forward. Colkitto, with an improvised council of war, awaited their coming in a great circle of flaring torches. As they advanced he scrutinised them closely, but gave no sign of recognition; for indeed he had never before set eyes on either of them. He bowed stiffly to their salute, and was about to begin an examination when all at once a Gordon adherent by his side leaped forward

with a great cry as if seized with sudden madness. The next moment he was on his bare knees kissing the hand of him who came foremost.

"At last, at last," he said, sobbing for joy. "Himself, himself," he added, rising and turning to Macdonald. Colkitto bent a piercing look upon the stranger thus saluted, and met eyes as keen and fearless as his own.

"Don't I know him, don't I know him," struck in the sobbing Gordon. The stranger drew up, smiling quietly.

"Major-General Macdonald," he said simply, "since my good friend here has divined the truth, Montrose greets you in the king's name."

At these words a great shout went up, Colkitto at the same time bowing as his proud back never bowed to mortal before.

"Thank God for the sight of your Excellency's face," he said in some confusion. "And a prisoner," he added instantly. "I will look to this. Restore his Excellency's sword; quick, and let the laggard look to it for his life."

"Nay, nay," said Montrose, with the same quiet smile. "See to it that your officer and his sentry be rewarded for their zeal, their vigilance, their devotion to duty. And now let me present my cousin, Patrick Graham of Inchbrakie, who is not unknown in Athole. Thank you, be not disturbed," he said, turning aside to the officer who had made him prisoner and was now so sorely smitten with contrition that he begged permission to replace the sword with his own hand. "I will myself buckle it on. And now that we may proceed with confidence and all convenient speed," added the Marquis, "I exhibit for your information the commission which I had the honour to receive from the hand of his Most Gracious Majesty the King."

Every head was uncovered as he unrolled the parchment. Macdonald bowed very low to scrutinise what he was too excited to read.

"Your Excellency," he said with a deep-drawn breath, "I and all who are with me place ourselves at your Excellency's command. Men," he cried aloud, for by this time the news had spread and the force

crowded to the great scene regardless of discipline, "he for whom we waited has come and is before you. Salute the King's General!"

And with a thunderous shouting and furious waving of torches the grateful order was obeyed.

"And how agrees the Athole air with you, Macdonald?" Montrose asked cheerily when the tumult of welcome had spent itself.

"The air is indifferently well, my lord," returned Colkitto. "Though I am sorry to tell your lordship it breeds disaffection. The Atholemen are this minute within two furlongs of my leaguer in armed force and prepared to assault. They would have prevented my coming here but that it was not my humour to be denied."

"Say you so? say you so?" returned Montrose. "They are hot sparks among these Athole hills. But unless our dear friend the Earl of Argyle has contrived to corrupt them, which I can scarce believe, the king hath nowhere friends more devoted nor readier to strike. You shall see how they fight, Macdonald. Ah! there comes a quiver of grey in the east. It will be daylight anon. Hark!"

"It is the sound of the Athole pipes," said Colkitto. "Our good friends are coming."

"A war tune as usual," said Montrose. "Well, do you forthwith give tuck of drum and take your men out hence."

"For battle, my lord?" asked Colkitto.

A smile glimmered on Montrose's face. "The Atholemen must have fit greeting," he replied. "Though I see not that it is incumbent on us to cut their throats."

"Your Excellency," rejoined Colkitto significantly, "he who draws first blood hath ever the advantage. Besides, these men of Athole have misused the king's officer most scurvily and shamefully."

"You shall see them make amends," said Montrose promptly. "By my faith, Macdonald, you shall see them make amends in such manner as a cavalier of your distinction has a right to expect."

With the glance of genius he had divined two things, Colkitto's vanity and Colkitto's ferocity ; and he knew how to manage both.

"In token of your readiness for events evacuate the Castle and draw up outside. There await further directions. Meanwhile I will myself go forth with Inchbrakie and do a little scouting."

"Your Excellency has neither eaten nor drunk after a most toilsome journey," said Colkitto. "Be pleased to have some rough snatch of breakfast such as poor cooks can furnish."

"I trow your cooks are well enough," returned Montrose, smiling. "But in truth we breakfasted an hour ago on a bannock and a draught of goat's milk furnished of his charity by a shepherd among the hills. Hark you how they come. We must make haste. I can hear the clash of blades in their pibroch. Come, Pate."

"They may mistake your Excellency," said Colkitto in some concern. "I pray you let me send a body-guard."

"Nay, nay," answered Montrose. "The sight of pikes and swords would but incite these rabid fighters the more. Hast any faith in astrology, Macdonald ? It promises me some duration of life, though the horoscope is troubled and dark in the end. I know the valour of your men. I pray you keep them well in hand, lest flint and steel strike too sharply. Come, cousin, let us out to greet them."

And with that the two went out alone to meet the advancing host.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGICIAN

THE sun was beginning to prick out the black crags on the brow of Ben Vrackie as Montrose and his companion left the Castle.

"Promise of a fair day, Pate," said the Marquis, like a hunter sniffing the wind in satisfaction.

"And a hot as well," returned Pate, thinking of feuds and bloodshed. "Hark you how blithely their chanters discourse for the onset. Were your lordship's coming delayed another hour these spitfires would be quenching their rage in each other's blood. I would we had them in a fitter humour."

"Patience till we shuffle the cards, Pate," rejoined Montrose lightly. "We will presently divert their rage to a worthier purpose. There has been grievous ruffling of feathers, as I can see. The Atholemen, as one surmises, somewhat disliked the manner of Colkitto's coming, and in consequence took to the whetting of dirks. 'Tis a pretty way these Murrays, Robertsons, and Stewarts have of conducting an argument. On his side likewise friend Alastair must needs appeal to the logic of pikes and Lochaber axes. Livy was right, Pate, '*Nata in vanos tumultus gens.*' 'Twas ever so. I verily believe these moor cocks are born with dirks and claymores in their claws. When they cannot slash the common enemy they must needs slash each other. I would I were sure of the stuff whereof Alastair Macdonald's Irishry are made. I mind me they covered themselves but scantily with glory under my lord Antrim."

"The soldier's glory is as his leader makes it," responded Inchbrakie meaningly.

"Think you then 'twas but a rag of Cæsar's mantle that fell on the good Antrim's shoulders?" said Montrose. "Mayhap he crossed his Rubicon timidly. Do you make out the war tune of our Athole friends?"

"They call it their invitation to the eagles to come to the flesh-eating," replied Inchbrakie, listening. "It ever portends slaughter."

"I should be sorry for Macdonald were the invitation to hold," said Montrose. "They have cruel sharp beaks, these Athole birds."

"They might find beaks as sharp and cruel as their own," returned Inchbrakie. "Macdonald looks no trifier. Saw you how he gathers his black brows?"

"Blacker than thine own, Pate," rejoined Montrose. "In truth, he smites with a terrible hand! It were dangerous to scratch him unwarily. But I trust he will make haste to withdraw from the Castle. To lie there were both provocation and challenge. Ah! look you, here they come, here they come," he cried, as the advance-guard of the Atholemen swung darkly into a glade of the forest. "Let us hasten, Pate, to greet them."

Colkitto was still in the excitement and bustle of withdrawal when a vast roar, a raging tornado of voices which rose and sank and rose again, peal upon peal, told him the Highlanders had at last found their chosen leader. Compared to that mighty outburst the greeting from his own men seemed half-hearted and meagre. Such a thunder and tumult of rejoicing had, perhaps, never before resounded among those sombre hills. For a little while, indeed, Montrose was in actual jeopardy from adherents as impetuous and frantic in joy as they were ardent and fierce in battle. Men fought to get near him, to touch his hand, to kiss the hem of his garment. It was a *mêlée* of loyalty and affection, a furious mobbing, as of an exiled prince restored to a people overwrought by the long strain of waiting.

And what was he who thus moved grim warriors to the madness of enthusiasm by his mere presence? Not

a hero of towering stature ; not a man of giant brawn ; but rather like Achilles, a man of graceful and beautiful mould, with a voice as soft as a woman's and the nameless charm which bewitches hearts.

He was still young among chiefs remarkable for youth. In truth he was in the very bloom of manhood, his years not yet quite two-and-thirty. An onlooker, knowing nothing of the man or his deeds, would never have guessed that here in this light, boyish figure was the dread of the Covenant faction and the particular terror of Argyle. In the great rejoicing he gave but one sign of disappointment.

"I note," he remarked to Struan, "that we have no word or aid from Huntly. That stubborn and perverse Loyalist stings my soul like an asp."

"It is not in Huntly's pride to forgive, my lord," said Struan, remembering past events.

"Forgive," repeated Montrose with an unconscious touch of bitterness. "If salvation depended on his forgiveness the number of the elect would indeed be small. He still broods over that ride to Edinburgh. Let him bear in mind it was not of my seeking or devising. Frendraught swore that Huntly must to the Castle of Edinburgh, and the Forbeses, Frasers and the rest of that crew were hot on the same plea. The decision was by vote, and I was one against many."

"But it goes that Huntly holds your lordship responsible," said Struan.

"Ay, ay," returned Montrose, a shade of annoyance crossing his face. "The highest tree must ever bear the brunt of the storm. I was in command, therefore I am guilty, though my wish was overborne. It was ever the plan of the Covenant to put a man in command, and then let preachers and such-like counsellors overrule his judgment. I have hopes the plan will work to our benefit presently. Meanwhile it were charity in the Marquis of Huntly to consider that some of us have found grace to repent of early sins, and would fain find them forgotten by our friends."

"My lord," returned Struan, "to speak frankly, methinks I spy another reason for Huntly's absence."

"Be pleased to give it, Struan," rejoined Montrose quickly.

"Why," said Struan, "that 'tis impossible for two eagles to sit on one nest. Our chief of Gordon would reign alone."

"What?" cried Montrose. "Is it to be King Gordon, then, instead of King Campbell? Are we to see Strathbogie instead of Inverary made the capital of the kingdom? In faith, Struan, ambitions run high in these gay times. Well, let them mount till they conquer the stars. For myself, inasmuch as I have but one object at heart, if the clansmen choose Huntly or another for their leader I am content. My sword will still be the king's."

"My lord," replied Struan gravely, "I speak not my own mind alone when I tell your lordship there is but one man breathing to-day who can lead the clans to victory. If he be superseded, I and those with me sheathe our swords and go home."

"Ah! Struan, Struan," responded Montrose fondly, "I would they were all like thee: we should soon have this rebellion stamped beneath the king's feet."

Huntly did not forgive, a circumstance of the most frightful import to king and realm. Had Huntly headed his Gordons that day in Blair Athole the course of history would have been different. But he sulked in resentment and jealousy; and hence events which made a whole world shudder.

"Well, well," said Montrose, burying his vexation, "it is ordained that the glory shall be wholly our own. And now," he added blithely, "let us to work."

"We are here at your lordship's command," responded Struan. "But give me leave to say you have been out on the hills all night and have had neither rest nor refreshment since coming hither."

"Wrong, Struan, wrong," retorted Montrose gaily. "What better refreshment could I have than the sight of the king's friends thus assembled to strike at rebellion and treason? Be assured I am much refreshed. As for rest, speak not of it yet awhile. Macdonald, I hear Argyle is on your track."

"Your Excellency," replied Macdonald, "if he made anything of haste he might be with us now."

"It is not Archie's custom to hasten overmuch when there happen to be hostile claymores in front," said Montrose, smiling lightly. "Not as hunter but as hunted does Argyle give a lesson in speed. Macdonald, I fear me you have disconcerted my lord grievously. I wager he is so deeply offended he will never come nearer than three days' march, if he find fair excuse for tarrying. I would give a thousand merks from a lean purse for the pleasure of greeting him here and now. Since he denies us that felicity, we must e'en turn elsewhere. Word reaches me that Tullibardine is raising the shire of Perth against the king's Majesty."

"He shall rue it," put in young Murray hotly. "By my father's house he shall rue it, if he come within reach of my sword."

"I had forgotten he was your brother," said Montrose gently.

"The better reason, my lord, that I should teach him the duty of loyalty," rejoined Murray stoutly.

"Nay, nay," said Montrose in kindly reproach. "You must promise me that if he come within reach of your sword no harm will be done to him. I know your true and high heart, Murray; but learn betimes that to cherish vengeance is to nurse a serpent in the bosom that will surely turn inward and strike at last. Wherefore, Murray, in the chance of fortune do thou err on the side of mercy."

"Get the like promise from him, my lord," returned Murray. "He knows not how to relent."

"Come stand beside me," replied Montrose, looking tenderly at the fiery youth. "There, there, you will find enough for your sword to do, I warrant you. Now, friends," addressing the assembled chiefs, "we have matters of great moment to consider. Argyle comes in the rear with a well-appointed, if somewhat tardy, army. In front are Drummond and Tullibardine marshalling the capon-lined burgesses of St. Johnstone with the men of Fife and Angus. Between is the king's

force, to be cracked, as the enemy believes, like a mouldy nut. A pretty game of hammer and anvil. Will it prosper ?”

“Never,” was the instant cry. “Never while we have breath to fight.”

“Let us swear it on our bare blades,” said Montrose, with one of the swift dramatic turns which sometimes made sober men gasp.

“On our bare blades, on our bare blades,” came the hoarse, fierce response, while the air sang with whirling steel. It was an animating spectacle.

“I would the king could see this,” said Montrose, his eyes gleaming with gladness. An inch seemed all at once to be added to his stature. His heart was leaping ; every fibre of him was alive with the spirit of victory.

“Your Excellency,” said Struan. “Please God the king shall see better than this or all is over.”

“Well and bravely spoken,” answered Montrose. “But ’tis a gladsome beginning. And now, if you please, to business.”

Thereupon officers were appointed and general orders issued. Colkitto, by priority of right, was already named Major-General, with immediate command of the Irish. By their own choice Inchbrakie was put at the head of the Highlanders of Athole and Strathtay, with Struan as Lieut.-Colonel, and the rest of the gentlemen in various posts of command.

While these swift arrangements were going on there stood by the side of Inchbrakie a slender, fair-faced boy, his nephew, the young laird of Lude. “Let me go too, sir,” he pleaded, plucking at his uncle’s sleeve.

“Tut, child, run away home,” answered Inchbrakie impatiently. “Go back to your mother.”

“It will be better, little man,” put in the Marquis, smiling upon the boy, “and tell her if you please that Montrose takes the liberty of inviting himself as his kinswoman’s guest to a hasty *déjeuner*.”

“Be off, little Lude,” cried black Pate. “Run, man, run, let us see the bob of your kilt. Nay, stay a bit,” he called in the next breath. “What would your Excellency have ?”

"My good Pate, would you have beggars turn choosers?" returned Montrose.

"I answer for my sister that whatever her poor store affords is as your Excellency's own," said Pate.

"No need of such assurance," was the quick response. "Have I not many times already tasted the hospitality of Lude House? As to fare, why a trout from the burn, a bird from the hill, a fowl from the barn, and handy kick-shaw will agree with my present appetite. And say," he told the boy, "that as time and the king's business press we follow immediately."

A singular honour thereby fell to the House of Lude, for on the *Truidh*, an eminence close by, the royal standard was unfurled on the wind. Montrose came forth for the ceremony, the Lady of Lude on his arm, the young heir trotting by her side; and the trumpets saluted. Tears of pride and joy sprang to her eyes as she thought of all that the occasion signified.

"Ah! my lord, I wish I had ten sons to give you this day," she told Montrose.

"Would there were more mothers in Israel like you," was the gallant reply. "A thousand mothers with hearts like thine were a boon indeed." He stooped and laid a hand on the fair head of her boy. "Take care of him," he said feelingly. "One day his king may have need of him."

She seized his hand and kissed it. "God prosper you, my lord, in this great enterprise," she said brokenly. "You have the widow's prayer. Is it too weak a thing to offer?"

He looked her straight in the eyes for a moment, his own full of emotion.

"Nay," he answered slowly. "What is stronger than the prayer of purity and goodness? Take my poor thanks and may your benison be the king's omen."

With that they parted, she retiring a little space with her boy to watch, he taking his place by the royal banner. An informal review followed, that the commander might the more closely examine the equipment of his force. It was such as would have daunted any heart but his own.

You are to bear in mind that Argyle and his thieves raided Athole in the spring, stripping it bare both of food and arms. A clean sweep the Campbell caterans made of it, not only emptying barn, byre and armoury, but taking brogues, plaids, kilts and hosen, and indeed anything else their tarry fingers could pick up. They had even the ill-manners to pluck the very gowns from the women's backs. A desolated country they left behind them, bare and smoking, for they came to glut a long-cherished revenge.

Imagine, then, how the Atholemen were armed. Nor were the Irish much better provided. The arms, in truth, were the most ridiculous medley of rusty swords and pikes, broken matchlocks, Lochaber axes, bows and arrows, nay, even cudgels from the wood. For cavalry there were three Galloway nags, hide and bone, which were led because they were not fit to carry. Such was the army with which Montrose undertook the task of conquering a rebel kingdom.

Ludicrous, said the wiseacres. Ludicrous indeed—were any one but Montrose at its head. We shall see what came of his madness.

"You march lightly accoutred," he remarked to Macdonald when the brief inspection was over.

"Light enough, my lord," assented Macdonald. "Yet we have been through the land of Lorn with these self-same weapons, and I leave your Excellency to ask our beloved friend Argyle whether he did not find them heavy enough. For all our trying we could never get a sight of his squint or his red head."

"He has a most pernicious modesty," rejoined Montrose. "We are ready to march?"

"This minute, your Excellency."

"I must have a word with the lads first," said Montrose.

They were drawn up close, and he spoke to them of loyalty and glory. His bonnet was off and the morning wind fondled his brown hair, lifting it in fluffs from his shoulders and rippling it over his brows. He had a look of ardency and youth that was bewitching. Withal there sat on him the ineffable air of leadership, indicating

a possible haughtiness of temper, certainly a capability of being peremptory. For all his *bonhomie* no man had ever the hardihood to slap James Graham on the back with a cry of hail-fellow-well-met. With brief, pointed eloquence he spoke now of deeds which would be a theme for bards in time to come; and he swayed that warrior throng as the summer wind rustles and sways the foliage.

"I hope you have all well kissed wives and bairns," he ended. "For we march forthwith. Three cheers for King Charles."

There were three and three more, and to these three again. And then the cheering done, all at once my lord put on the aspect of war.

"We camp to-night by the Tay," he told them. "Macdonald, let the troops advance, the Atholemen leading as guides. And you, Pate, send our swiftest messenger to Menzies of Weem, asking him in the king's name to furnish us with needed supplies as we pass."

The great bull voice of Colkitto roared, company commanders and sergeants bellowed, the pipers struck up the Athole quickstep, and the king's men, lifting their voices jubilantly, set forth upon their prodigious enterprise.

CHAPTER V

THE BADGE OF HEATHER

By midday they were in the cool breezes of Loch Tummel. By evening they were topping the heights above Appin of Weem, and looking across to the rich woodlands of Breadalbane, where the Campbells swarmed like flies about a honey-pot. The battlements of Balloch Castle, clearly visible among the trees, were as an invitation thither; and, indeed, nothing but the urgency of haste prevented Montrose from turning aside to requite the ill-deeds of the Glenorchy chiefs.

A little down by under the shoulder of Drummond Hill, through a gap in the thick fir forest, he could see the foam-flecked Lyon flashing over the ford of Comrie. Here it was that three years before Archibald Campbell, in the dizziness of overweening ambition, saw himself vaulting to a throne. My lord had good reason to remember the effects of the homily then delivered concerning the deposition of a king, "*Venditione, desertione, invasione.*" According to the grim fashion of the time it cost several heads, though in the pinch of treason the supple shifter and tacker contrived to keep his own skin whole by providing scapegoats for the sacrifice.

At Appin of Weem Montrose and his men were in the country of Menzies, a chief still disloyally under the influence of Argyle. Word came presently that the laird of Weem had treated Montrose's messenger with great scorn and indignity, threatening cropped ears and a dungeon if ever again he dared to show his impudent face within the precincts of Castle Menzies.

"I have no trokings with turncoats," he cried, with

a lurid oath. "Tell James Graham that I am soon for Edinburgh to see him get what he deserves at the hands of the hangman. Ach, man! never a sight could be sweeter to my eyes. And now be gone, for a very dirty fellow, lest I give your carcase to feed my dogs."

"Crows he so loud and so soon?" was Montrose's remark upon this incivility. "He forgets that the mavis is apt to lament when it begins to sing too early. We will wait on Alastair by and by, as occasion serves, touching this little matter."

He would have pursued his way peaceably but that Weem, bubbling with hate and mistaking haste and leniency for timidity, fell on the rear-guard of the Irish, a grave error of judgment considering the temper of their leader.

"Tut! Alastair forgets his manners entirely!" said Montrose. "Macdonald, draw off, and give the fool a lesson."

Colkitto's eyes gleamed with satisfaction for authority to do what he meant to do in any case.

"He speaks of hanging," he said. "What say you, my lord, about giving him a dose of his own physic? Methinks the Menzies chief dangling over his own castle gate would be a most excellent and edifying lesson for a whole countryside of rogues."

"'Tis not worth while," returned Montrose. "Nevertheless, let him have something to remember, so that, should we chance to pass this way again, he may not repeat these discourtesies."

It was now the end of August. The recent months had been dry and hot, and already the harvest stood reaped in the fields. Colkitto saved the need of garnering it, for that night Appin was red with fire.

"Stooks and roofs make bonnie bonfires," he remarked contentedly. "The bare-legged vermin will think of us when the hearth-side is a puddle of rain and sleet, and there is nothing in the meal gurnal. Maybe the pride of their churl of a chief will feed hunger."

With great zest the Antrim men rifled the chests and larders of Castle Menzies, Colkitto leaving a satirical message that the hospitality of Appin was so much to

his mind he hoped very soon to enjoy it afresh. Thus was the first blow struck.

Next morning, the 31st of August, 1644, the Royalists shook themselves dry on the south bank of the Tay, by the village of Aberfaldie, a cluster of huts tucked between pine wood and river.

Too busy throughout the night to think of sleep, Montrose was forth before the sun, welcoming afresh accessions to his forces. For several notable men of the shire who were unable to join him in Athole hastened to his standard at Aberfaldie—Stewarts of Pitnacree, Ballechin and Dalguise, all in the Strath of Tay, Furgusson of Dunfallandy, above Tummel, and others, with their friends and dependents, fighters every man of them, and eager to set the rip of oats in their bonnets.

From behind bush and rock the Campbells and their allies watched, muttering imprecations into their red beards. One only had the hardihood to face the lion and brook his rage. This was Elspeth of the Eye, a weird, malign hag of uncanny gifts, whom the boldest man in the strath would not wantonly cross. Suddenly, as Montrose conversed with his friends, there arose a tumult which was immediately explained by the shrill voice of Elspeth.

"Where is he?" she was calling furiously. "Where is the black traitor, James Graham, who calls himself Marquis of Montrose, that I may look on him? Where is the man who would turn this fair Scotland of ours into a lake of blood, that I may speak a word in his ear?"

A gruff voice intervened to drive her off, but her demand only became the louder and shriller.

"Must I blast the bones in your body?" she cried. "Out of my way with you!" and with the lithe skip of a goat she was past the speaker, her lean grey hair and rags of Campbell tartan fluttering in the wind. Thinking her some demented creature in a frenzy of grief or delusion, young Murray stepped forth to pacify her.

"Stay, stay, my good woman," he said, raising his hand. "You had better go away home."

She made him a mock curtesy. "Stay, stay, my good woman," she repeated, with a curdling laugh. "You had better go away home. Oh, my bonnie young man! it's yourself that had better go away home. The ravens and the eagles are gathering for a feast. I can hear the beating of their wings. What knows that soft, beardless cheek of war? Killing, look you, is for men. Go home, my bairn, I hear a mother wailing." All at once she took a step nearer. "Is it not the Murray tartan I see? Not Tullibardine? surely not Tullibardine? Go home, go home, ere it be dabbled in blood."

"Come, come," said Murray, paling a little in spite of himself under the hag's scrutiny. "This is no time for words. You cannot see the Marquis. Let that be enough."

"Cannot see the Marquis?" she repeated, in screeching contempt. "Cannot see the Marquis? It's James Graham I want," she went on, pushing past him, "not bairns that ought to be in their mother's keeping; ay, him who calls himself Marquis, and is doing the devil's work of dyeing our bonnie Highland heather with blood."

All this time Colkitto was regarding her with a grim smile on his dark face. "An arrow for a Corbie crow and a silver penny for a witch," he remarked suggestively.

"Tut! tut! would you deny an old wife her fill of flyting?" said Montrose, stepping out and confronting her. "He is before you, mother, whom you seek."

She leaned forward, her evil eye fixed on him, her face lit up with a fiendish malignity.

"Ay, it must be himself," she said. "They told me of the love-lock; that was always the mark of vanity and sin. There it hangs that should have the shears at the root of it. They told me of the high, proud look; there it is. They told me——"

"Good mother, they seem to have told you many things not worth the telling," said Montrose, interrupting her tirade. "What would you have with James Graham, who calls himself Marquis of Montrose?"

"What would I have with him?" she cried, her face blackening with rage. "I would have his living heart torn out of his breast. I would have these nails buried deep in his eye-sockets." And she shook a pair of vulture claws in his face.

"By my grandfather's beard, and that same is a pretty wish," commented Colkitto. "Good wife, do they burn witches hereabouts?"

"Burn witches!" she said, turning on him hoarse with venom. "Burn witches——"

"Even so," quoth Colkitto calmly. "Because if they do, on the soul of me I cannot help thinking you ought to be at your prayers. Saw you any bonfires when you were out on your broomstick nag last night?"

"Broomstick nag, you foul villain!" she shrieked. "I was on no broomstick nag. Yet saw I the roof and the corn-stook blazing. Ay, and I heard women crying."

"Tuts," said Colkitto. "It's honey to a woman to greet. But as touching the bonfires, let me whisper in your ear that witches burn better than stooks and roofs."

She was momentarily staggered and abashed. It was the first time for nearly a generation that any one had dared to meet her maledictions with threats. But she was quickly herself again.

"Ah, ha," she cried, peering viciously at Colkitto. "Is it the black face of Alastair Macdonald I see before me?"

"Black or fair, it's a face Alastair Macdonald has never found it in his heart to deny, good wife of the wild grey locks," answered Colkitto with unruffled coolness.

"False reiver, I have heard of you," she hissed, waving her arms like a bird of prey flapping wings at its victim. "The hillsides of the west are yet wet with the crimson dew in your track. May your own pay for the innocent blood you have shed."

"Ay, 'twas exceeding innocent," returned Colkitto. "As innocent as that in your own bonnie veins, you old she-scratch-the-cat."

"Stand aside," she yelled at him. "Stand aside, till I talk to your betters. And this is James Graham,"

she said, facing Montrose. She spat on her fingers and cracked them. "I curse him body and soul, in all his gear and belongings, house and land, byre and kye; may his child never smile on his knee, or his wife gladden him; may his truest friend prove false in the hour of need, and his enemy triumph in his sight."

"You have learned your lesson aptly, old wife," said Montrose good-humouredly. "Argyle himself could not better that ban."

"Is it Argyle you are daring to name?" she retorted, yet more ferociously.

But if Montrose was forbearing, Colkitto was not so disposed. "Tush, woman," he said sternly. "Go and wash your dirty face, and when that's done, rinse out that foul mouth of yours. My lord," he added, turning to Montrose, "leave the skirling witch to me. It is not meet your lordship should be troubled thus."

And without more ado he ordered his men to seize her. She spat at them, she screeched curses, she scratched like a wild cat. "Off with her," said Colkitto, disregarding these demonstrations. "Off with her, and if she is too troublesome, duck her in the burn; it will do two things she is much in need of—cool her and clean her."

She faced about, shaking a grimy fist at him. "May your fate be as black as your heart, and then it will be black enough," she cried. "Ah, ha!" With an eldritch laugh, she broke from the men who held her, and was off across the burn, hop-skip-and-leap, as if she had springs in her toes. On the other side she turned and squared again, defying Montrose, Colkitto, and their whole army.

"Truly a well-wisher of ours, Macdonald," smiled Montrose.

"I have met her like before," replied Colkitto. "And my mind on it is this, my lord, that the stake and the torch would be the fit return for her wishes."

"Wouldst burn witches for amusement?" laughed Montrose. "She is beside herself with venom. Well, let her tongue run. Ah! what have we now? Why all this sudden running to and fro?"

As he spoke the sound of pipes reached their ears, and a minute later the gleam of muskets and pikes to the westward told of the approach of an armed force.

"Has Balloch after all plucked up heart for an engagement?" said Montrose.

"Heaven send us that same good fortune," responded Colkitto. "Gladly would I have a bit ploy with Balloch."

"My gentle fire-brand, ever, like Hotspur, on the itch to strike," returned Montrose. "It were scarce worth our while to turn aside for Balloch, seeing what game is in the wind."

"If they molest us, my lord?" asked Colkitto.

"Then he shall pay for his ill-manners," replied Montrose.

"If my ears judge aright, that is no Campbell piper," put in young Murray. "Listen, my lord."

"I cannot make out the pibroch," said Montrose, giving ear intently. "Can we have here by any chance Argyle's advance-guard?"

Colkitto laughed disdainfully. "My lord of Argyle," he cried, "in affairs of this sort is the most sensible and peaceable man in Scotland. He would run a race on a hot summer day rather than throw himself on sword points. You may bide till Martinmas, my lord, and Argyle will still be his three days off."

"In any case send out and ascertain who comes," said Montrose.

"The Macnab pibroch!" cried young Murray excitedly. "As I live, the Macnab pibroch"; and in a boyish exuberance he was off, racing to meet the new-comers. A few minutes later the laird of Macnab marched with fifty men into Montrose's open ranks, every face of the fifty seamed with dust and sweat.

Montrose hastened to give the salutation and welcome that a jealous Highlander thrice primed with pride and loyalty considered his due on such an occasion.

"My lord, you are pleased to be gracious about a little thing, a very little thing," Macnab replied ecstatically, mopping his brow. "The fear was on me

we were late to catch you here. But we would have been over the hills after you—oh yes. I heard of the gathering in Athole from a shepherd body, and the coming of Alastair Macdonald from the West country and all that. Then I found out you were coming by Appin and Strathtay to get at the fat burghers of St. Johnstone; so these good fellows and myself buckled on, my lord, being greatly encouraged by the Appin fires last night, and here we are—pike, dirk, sword, musket, Lochaber axe, and what not, ready for any ploy your lordship may have on hand.”

“I am more joyful than I can tell you,” was Montrose’s beaming response. “The king will be glad of this, Macnab.”

“Tell his Majesty,” said Macnab, drawing himself up with the mien of a prince, “that as long as there is a drop of Macnab blood left unshed by that abominable vermin, clan Diarmid, or such other trash and spawn of his enemies as it may please God to raise up for destruction, he will not be without friends in Scotland, blessings on him.”

“Amen,” said Montrose feelingly.

“And say to his Majesty, forby,” pursued Macnab, expanding on the thought of these messages to royalty, “that when all traitors, rebels, and seditious persons whatsoever have gone to the place he kens of, maybe he’ll just be looking round by Elian Rowan and Kinnel to pick a deer shank or the liver wing of a capercailzie with Alan Macnab.”

“His Majesty, I feel sure, will be honoured,” returned Montrose gravely.

“It is not a palace, my lord,” said Macnab, with a great air of condescension. “It is not a palace. And what with a Campbell hacking at it here, and a Menzies or a Grant hewing at it there, its face is not just so bonnie as I could wish; but whenever it shall please his Majesty the King to come, there’s a bed for him, and a chair and table, ay, and for him who bears his seal and commission,” and Macnab doffed gallantly.

“On behalf of my royal master and myself I thank you most heartily,” returned Montrose. “And now

these brave fellows of yours must have sharp appetites after such a morning's exercise."

"Indeed, then, to be plain with ye, my lord," responded Macnab, "there is not what you would call a routh of meat under the belt of any of us. Ye see, we have been on the road all night with never a friendly hand to give us bite or sup by the way; and it's the simple truth, our stomachs are wondering what has come over our teeth. We'd have been with you sooner, only when we got to the end of Loch Tay west by here what must that poor creature Balloch do but take it into his tousy head to stand like a fighting-cock in the middle of the road before us, and say this wasn't a road for the Macnabs at all, and we'd better be turning back or he was of opinion there would be widows and orphans over the business. Tuts, I ask ye, my lord, could flesh and blood put up with it?"

"I daresay Macnab flesh and blood found the ordeal somewhat trying," replied Montrose humorously.

"The Macnab flesh and blood, if it please your lordship, did not for one minute try to endure it," was the rejoinder. "So there was a bit of a splore, as ye'd say. I'm thinking our dirks are hardly dry yet. 'Argyle shall hear of this,' says Balloch, as his men lay spluttering on their faces. 'Toots, it will give him an appetite,' says I. 'And there's always the fun of the funeral. Maybe you will have the goodness to tell Argyle that when he's ready to settle he may depend on finding Alan Macnab, who is very bad at the running away!'"

At this hit there was a burst of laughter, but Montrose's face was grave. "Has there been killing, then?" he asked, with a slight ruffle of the brows.

"Och, nothing to speak of," replied Macnab airily. "Nothing at all worth your lordship's notice. A rogue here and a rogue there who wouldn't keep out of the way got a bit of a prog that maybe disagreed with him. There'll be a funeral or two to pass the time with till we come back. But no harm done, none at all except hindering us when we were in a big hurry."

"I hope you have lost no men," said Montrose.

"Since when was the glede a match for the eagle?" responded Macnab proudly. "My lord, my lord, is it thinking you are that half a hundred Macnabs couldn't make their way through a wheen Balloch and Glenorchy trash? Step out, my lads," he cried, turning to his men, "till his lordship sees ye."

He named each man in succession. "Not a mother's son missing," he said. "Your lordship will understand I did not bring you these bonnie fellows because they could not take care of themselves by the roadside among scabby Campbells."

"I am glad to know," said Montrose cordially, quick to discern the manner of man he was dealing with, "that the Macnabs have once again proved their skill and valour. Well, his Majesty has need of them."

"As sure as the right is better than the wrong his Majesty shall have them," returned Macnab, his chin high in the air. "If I was to see a Macnab turning tail, look you, there is a dirk here." And he made a significant motion.

"Never, I am sure, will it have to be used as you hint," said Montrose. "A Macnab is not like the fat knight of Eastcheap who covered himself with dead men in battle for fear of the foe. And now," he added, feeling that more time could not be spent on this colloquy, "if you and our other friends who have just arrived will eat a bite of breakfast, I will attend to one or two needful things."

Breakfast was over, and the whole body in order to march, when the voice of Macnab was heard calling above the din: "Tuts, tuts, what are we thinking of? We have forgotten the oat stalk. Colin, my lad, run away out and see if there's a stook anywhere handy, and bring in a pickle."

And not till every Macnab of them had blended the oat rip of Montrose with his own heather badge was the force free to march.

Meanwhile there was the most urgent need of haste. On the night before, without rest or sleep, Inchbrakie went out to reconnoitre with a picked company of the Atholemen, and Montrose had scarcely climbed

the height above Aberfaldie towards Amulree when Pate met him with intelligence that the enemy had been sighted on the hill of Buchanty on the Almond.

"Macdonald," said Montrose gleefully, turning to his Major-General. "You hear the good news?"

"Let us pray it be not too good to be true," was Macdonald's reply.

"Think you we can march a little quicker?" asked Montrose, his eyes gleaming. "Our lads are doing so well already, I like not to put too much upon them."

"I will answer for the men of Antrim," replied Macdonald. "Let Inchbrakie answer for the rest."

"Inchbrakie answers," put in Patrick Graham promptly.

"Then," said Montrose, "let it be the last foot foremost with us all."

When the General's wishes were announced a great shout evinced the enthusiasm of the men, who swung forward with the magnificent springy stride of the mountaineer. But of all the eager men there none was half so eager as the General himself.

CHAPTER VI

AMALEKITES

FOR the Marquis's private ear Inchbrakie brought secret and disquieting intelligence, to wit, that the force on the hill of Buchanty was commanded by none other than his trusted friend Kilpont, heir to the earldom of Menteith. Not less astonishing or disturbing was the news that with Kilpont were Sir John Drummond, son of the Earl of Perth, and the young Master of Madderty, husband of Beatrice Graham, my lord's ward and favourite sister. The force under these old friends comprised the retainers of Menteith, of Napier and Keir, all close and tried allies on whose aid Montrose had confidently reckoned in his present venture. It was like a stab in the heart to find them against him.

"Have the evangelists of Argyle been at the work of conversion, think you?" he said, a spasm of pain in his face.

"The Earl is most apt and skilful in beguiling," answered Inchbrakie. "Truly, methinks none ever excelled him since the serpent gave up practice in Eden."

"Yet would I fain believe," said Montrose, "that those true hearts were proof against his wheedling. Kilpont, Drummond, and Madderty rebels! I tell you, Pate, I would as soon suspect myself of the sin of witchcraft. 'Tis the curse of this distracted time that friend is scarce to be distinguished from foe. Be assured we here have some mystery to be fathomed, some misunderstanding to be set right. But say nothing of it, Pate, not even to Macdonald. 'Twere to discredit

ourselves to let it be known that men whom we hold dear as our own souls were in truth leaving us. Therefore, good cousin, keep your own counsel."

"Tight as if it were locked under iron lids," replied Inchbrakie.

"We will see what reason can accomplish before fighting," said Montrose. "Let our first business be to remove whatever stumbling-block makes our friends err, and win them back."

"And if they are not to be won?" asked Inchbrakie.

"Then they must be overwhelmed," was the instant reply. There spoke the real Montrose.

But he had judged aright of his friends' steadfastness. In truth the Menteith men were out to assail and destroy the Irish, who were regarded as common enemies. As soon as it was known that Montrose himself was at the head of the advancing army, Kilpont immediately sent messengers to treat with him. The Marquis received them with the most fervent cordiality, frankly stated his business, and appealed to Kilpont and the other leaders, by the affection they bore him, to abstain from acts of treason glozed over by designing knaves as duty to the State. There could be no duty to the State that was not also duty to the king, so long as he reigned lawfully and rightly. Finally, he adjured them by their honour and the names they bore to join him in putting down the rebellion.

"Bear ye that message," he told the envoys, "to my lord Kilpont, to Sir John Drummond, and David, Master of Madderty. And God speed the right."

Their response was to come over immediately to his standard, bringing with them five hundred of the best bowmen in Scotland—an invaluable accession. They also brought intelligence that the Covenanters were massing in formidable strength at Perth under Lord Elcho, and were mightily puffed up, inasmuch as the Lord in His mercy was delivering the disturbers of Israel into their hands to be destroyed. The situation was indeed animating. Before was Elcho, behind Argyle, each leading a powerful army; between was Montrose, to be crushed and flung to the eagles.

"What mean you to do, my lord?" Kilpont asked in some doubt.

"Strike, Kilpont," was the quick reply. "Strike at once, and strike hard."

Kilpont instinctively looked round the ragged, ill-armed force, unmistakable anxiety in his face. Montrose noted both the look and the expression.

"You are of opinion, Kilpont, there is little to strike with," he said as lightly as if he were discussing a game of golf on the links by his old college of St. Andrews. "And I perceive by the gravity of their faces that Drummond and Madderty are of a like mind."

"I was thinking, my lord," replied Kilpont uneasily, "that Elcho has a large army, complete in everything—horse, foot, guns, and ammunition."

"And that we have a small army perilously incomplete in those same essentials," rejoined Montrose.

"Truly the lack of cavalry is a grave defect, my lord!" Kilpont ventured.

"Cavalry!" cried Montrose, laughing. "Have you forgotten our three brave steeds in the rear yonder? each of them I warrant as fit as Rosinante for feats of valour. Thou canst not say we have no cavalry. You think, Kilpont," he went on more seriously, "that only a miracle will give us victory, and that outside of religion, as Monsieur Montaigne has it, miracles are no longer in fashion. Let us prove that. Was not Alexander reckoned mad by the wise men about him? I ask for nothing better than a small, small share of his madness. We are in sore need of arms. What then? The enemy has them; and, my dear Kilpont, he who runs may read the moral. What says the Major-General?" he asked, turning to Colkitto.

"In truth, my lord," replied Colkitto, "if I had stopped to ponder the odds against me every time I was in a strait from my landing at Ardnamurchan till I had the happiness to see your lordship's face in Athole, why, 'tis my honest opinion this poor body of mine would now be feeding the daws and ravens of Argyle."

"What is it my ears are hearing?" put in Macnab grandly. "Gentlemen swithering to fight. Tuts, tuts,

have we trudged and tramped here over hill and bog just for the fun of running away again? I say let us have a look at this big, fierce Elcho, and then we'll decide about showing him our backs."

"My good man, who talks of showing backs?" demanded Drummond.

"My good man yourself," returned Macnab warmly. "Look you, when there is fighting on hand and a man lifts his heels to the other side it's in my mind that what he's doing is as like showing his back as one green pea is to another. And if you have anything more to say, sir, why you and I might be stepping aside and arguing the thing by ourselves, and not hindering others," and he bowed, his hand significantly on the familiar hilt.

"I can see that our good friend Macnab is for striking at once," said Montrose, stepping as by accident before the bristling Highland chieftain.

"Macnab," cried that worthy, scowling upon Drummond, "is for seeing the face of them he came to see, just as fast as feet can take him to St. Johnstone."

Montrose cast a look of intelligence at Drummond, as though to say, "Can't you read him? Please do not raise unnecessary fires." "I take it upon me to say that is the spirit of us all," he said, smiling upon Macnab and speaking in a tone that was in itself oil and balm. "You see, my lord Kilpont, we have to consider this, that there are two armies opposed to us, one in front and one in the rear. We are now as the wedge that may lie helpless or split the tree asunder."

"Let us hear it splintering, my lord," cried Macnab, still with a scowling eye on Drummond.

"Our intention precisely," replied Montrose affably. "But it grows dark and the men are weary. Let's to rest. At peep of day to-morrow we move on the enemy."

"And the order of march and battle, my lord?" asked Macdonald.

"You will lead your own brave men of Antrim," answered Montrose. "Inchbrakie with Struan, Grancilly and Murray will take care of my Athole and

Strathtay lads. Macnab and his valiant band will have a place of their own. You, my lord Kilpont, with Drummond, will lead the gallant men of Menteith, Napier and Keir. For Madderty," he added, smiling upon his young brother-in-law, "I have other work. And now, gentlemen all, for sentries and supper."

Before the day broke the bugles were blowing. By eight o'clock, after a brisk march, Montrose had the happiness to sight the enemy drawn up on the wide plain of Tippermuir, three miles from Perth—eight thousand men, including near a thousand horse, in battle array. He had himself but three thousand at the utmost, armed as we know; and for cavalry the three Galloway nags of which he had made a jest with Kilpont. Yet he never stayed to reckon the odds.

Elcho's solid ranks were jubilant. With their own eyes they could see the insignificance of the enemy, a handful of barbarous Irish and hill-men. Besides, the ministers were exceedingly fervent in citing Scripture for incitement to bloodshed. One, Mr. Frederick Carmichael, as chaplain of the Fife contingent had come all the way from Markinch to witness the heaped-up slaughter of the Amalekites.

"If ever God spoke certain truth out of my mouth," declared the zealous Frederick, "in His Name I promise you a certain victory to-day. Go forth in your might, slay and spare not."

Others of the brethren emulated Mr. Carmichael to such a pitch, you might have thought the very arm of God Himself was bared for havoc and vengeance. Perhaps it was.

While these pious exhortations to carnage were going on, Montrose put his little army in order of battle. The main body, composed of Colkitto's Irish, he put in the centre, Kilpont and his bowmen on the left, with Macnab's Highlanders, and the Atholemen on the right. With the latter he took his place himself.

The enemy made a brave and imposing show, with floating banners and burnished arms. On the right Elcho himself commanded, the centre was under Tullibardine, young Murray's renegade brother, the

left under Sir James Scott, a soldier trained in the Continental wars. He faced Montrose.

The hurried dispositions made, there was a pause and the armies looked at each other. Then all at once the ministers, instigated by the sanguinary prophet of Markinch, began to call out that the time had come and that the enemy must not be allowed to escape.

While they were thus engaged Madderty approached with a flag of truce. He was sent, he told Elcho, in reply to a rough demand concerning his business, to declare that the idea of shedding his countrymen's blood was abhorrent to the king's Lieutenant-General, who had no desire or aim but to obey his sovereign dutifully, loyally, and peaceably, if so it might be permitted him. He added that he had no personal end to serve nor any private ambition to gratify, except to see peace restored in the unhappy realm of Scotland. He ended by summoning Elcho and those associated with him to lay down their arms and return to their allegiance, promising in the king's name and by royal authority that none of them should suffer in body or estate. If they refused he would not answer for the consequence. A cry of savage scorn was the answer to this summons. Elcho would have sent back the envoy according to the usages of war ; but the ministers, growing every moment hotter and more furious for the fray, angrily forbade it. Madderty was therefore made prisoner, with such indignities and insults as they knew how to heap upon a captive.

While awaiting the return of his flag of truce Montrose chatted with his officers as gaily, wittily, genially as if they were bent on a holiday frolic instead of a matter of life and death. It was one of his subtle methods of relieving and sustaining the minds of others. Only Inchbrakie, the Tutor of Struan, and one or two more who knew him intimately, understood the swift glance he cast from time to time in the direction of the enemy and expectation of his envoy.

Colkitto meanwhile was busy up and down the ranks, directing, inspiring, jesting grimly as his fashion was. He too cast looks at the enemy, slyly from under his

thick black eyebrows, and with each look his teeth set the harder. The General himself apart, he was probably the only man there who clearly saw the peril of attacking and yet was resolved for battle. He came up presently, a grim smile on his face.

"My lord," he said to Montrose, "methinks Elcho is over hospitable. He keeps Madderty for breakfast. 'Tis my opinion he means to keep him for dinner as well."

"I begin to be of your mind," responded Montrose, his changed expression showing the mental tension he was undergoing.

"Is it not time to slip the leash, my lord, and let the hounds go?" said Colkitto.

"I must speak a word first," answered Montrose.

Being on foot and no giant in stature, he could neither make himself heard nor seen. So he permitted Struan and Inchbrakie to hoist him on their shoulders, and from that swaying platform he addressed his men.

"You see what has happened," he called in his clear, rich voice. "Instead of letting our messenger return to us as honourable men would, 'tis plain they have made him prisoner and at any moment his head may greet our eyes on a pike-point. We sued for peace and they answer us with scorn and defiance. Comrades, I ask you, is not their conduct a challenge?"

"It is, it is," came in a resounding roar.

"I see," he pursued, his countenance shining, "the king's cause will not suffer if brave men can uphold it. This is not the time for speech, but I must add one more word. Be sparing of your powder. We have none to waste. Let not a musket be fired except in the very face of the enemy. When you are near enough give them a single discharge and then at them with pike, claymore, and butt-end. I would we were better provided. But valour never yet lacked a weapon. Comrades and brothers, we want nearly everything, and everything we want is with the enemy. In the name of God and the king—forward." And with that, leaping to the ground, he placed himself at the head of the Athole Highlanders, carrying pike and targe.

like a common soldier. In the same moment the great voice of Macdonald repeated the order, and next minute a score of pipes were screaming.

Simultaneously the enemy's bugles rang out, the foot began to move, and the artillery blazed.

"Good boys," cried Colkitto in contempt as the balls sang overhead. "We'll take no harm. It's at the morning star they're aiming."

When the infantry moved the horse stood motionless a little as though selecting their point of attack. All at once their trumpets sounded and they started at the trot. They had scarcely trotted when they were at the gallop; they were scarcely at the gallop when they were at the charge, bearing down on Kilpont's bowmen and Macnab's Highlanders on the right, where the Royalists were weakest. Little wonder that for one breathless instant Montrose's heart stood still as he watched them. The next he gave an angry exclamation. For Macnab and Murray, who stood by him with a handful of Atholemen, instead of waiting for the charge sprang forward to meet it. Montrose bit his lip.

"They will be cut to pieces," he said. "They will be cut to pieces. Oh! will that impetuous Highland blood never learn discretion?"

But even as he spoke Kilpont's bowmen rushed to the support of their comrades. Next minute four hundred horsemen were upon the little band of Highlanders, but not before the bowmen, coolly taking aim, poured in a volley of arrows that emptied threescore saddles. There was a moment's fierce confusion as trooper, musketeer, pikeman and bowman rolled together. Then, to the relief as well as the utter astonishment of Montrose, the cavalry emerged in flight, pursued by the fleet-footed Highlanders, and went helter-skelter upon their own advancing infantry.

Genius saw its chance and took it. Before the astounded foot could recover from the shock Montrose was leading his clansmen to the charge. Between the two forces rose a tiny hillock, and for this point of vantage both sides raced. Not in vain had Montrose's redshanks trained wind and limb in hill-climbing.

Bounding like deer they were over the top and down the other side headlong, while the beefy burgesses of Perth and the flaccid unwinded men of Fife were still panting halfway up. With the shout which has been the omen of victory on so many battlefields, the Atholmen hurled themselves on their opponents. That terrific and furious shock the prophetic souls of the morning had not included in their scheme of triumph and vengeance.

Sir James Scott did all that skill and bravery could do to turn the torrential rush. He seemed to be everywhere, cutting, slashing, directing, animating ; a man of charmed life. And for a little his example and inspiration made his men almost as valiant as himself. For perhaps fifteen minutes the issues hung in the balance, for fifteen minutes and no more of raging death. Again and again in that short space the gallant Covenanting leader rallied his reeling men and struck home as strikes the lion at bay. In his fury he even forgot his religion and with great oaths swore he would himself lay dead the first man who cravenly showed his back. His sword would have been busy, and thrice busy, had he kept that vow.

You are to imagine a company of tigers among a pack of house-dogs. The house-dogs may be twenty or a hundred to one, but what do numbers avail ? Above the hoarse growls of passion, above the cries of mortal agony and fright, rose the voice of Sir James Scott, desperately inciting his men. It was answered by the triumphal yells of the Highlanders. Nothing human could have withstood that onset. Terrified and unnerved, Scott's foot broke and fled, even as the cavalry had broken and fled, carrying their helpless chief with them. And then was seen the spectacle of a brave man weeping impotently.

"You cowards," he shouted hoarsely, striking in a blind rage at his own men. "You cowards." And then with a gasp of anguish : "My God ! we are running, we are running. Oh ! the rank, galling shame of it ; we are running."

They were in truth running as runs a panic-stricken

rabble. Yet Scott's men were the last to break. For Alastair Macdonald and his Irish had done to Tullibardine and Elcho, only more swiftly owing to their weaker resistance, what the Highlanders did to Sir James. But an hour or two before the Covenanting leaders, full of pride and haughtiness, described Montrose's force as "Naked runagates, weaponless, ammunitionless and cannonless." And behold now the vauntful host a flying mob with no thought except to save its own precious skin. The runagates were no longer weaponless and ammunitionless, for arms, munitions, colours, drums, tents, baggage, in a word all that could impede flight, became theirs.

CHAPTER VII

JUBILEE OF THE CLANS. A DIVINE IN TROUBLE

NEVER in all their lives before had the paunchy, wheezing burgesses of St. Johnstone shown themselves such runners. Yet their utmost speed availed little. Many a gasping burgher fell down in his flight and died without stroke, "bursten" from fright and exertion. Two thousand slain and as many prisoners, four thousand out of the prime army of eight thousand that went out in the fullest assurance to annihilate Montrose, and the remainder scattered whithersoever they could fly, such was the tale of the day's work. It was Sabbath, the 1st of September 1644. All day the sun shone softly out of a dappled sky, and at night the harvest moon came forth without cloud as though to light the victors on. Slain and taken would have been double, but that the winners must needs plunder as they went, a practice sorely against Montrose's heart.

Ravenous for pillage they were that day who gathered up the riches of the Covenant between Tippermuir and Perth. Yet they tempered power with mercy. The burgher who made an unseemly noise over his despoiling was indeed quieted with dirk, pike, or musket-butt as might be handy. But such as had the grace to behave decently were stripped and allowed to go, like sheep from the shears. Scant and airy was the raiment of the majority when they had passed through the hands of the shearers. Many a portly burgess, many a capon-lined magistrate crouched on the ground or slunk off groaning in the futile attempt to hide the openness of his disgrace.

Of the plight of ministers Montrose had himself evidence in the experience of a divine with whom one of Macnab's Highlanders was dealing according to use and wont.

"Worthy sir," the distracted minister was pleading as the Marquis came up. "Have mercy. In God's Name I pray you have mercy."

"Hooch, in Gott's name pe quiet," was the scornful reply, "if she will not want ta tirk atween her ribs."

Thereupon, seizing his Reverence the Highlander jerked him over like an obstreperous wether at the shearing stool, rifled his pockets and then uncereemoniously pulled his coat over his head. In this extremity the minister saw and recognised Montrose.

"My lord, my lord," he entreated in a voice of terror. "Save me from this man. Robbery, sacrilegious robbery. My lord, be not like unto Achan the son of Carmi whom Joshua destroyed for his sins in the valley of Achor."

"Ach! and iss it a coat like that Joshua will haf?" demanded his assailant, holding up the clerical garb in profound and bitter disgust, and dashing it in the owner's face made after better quarry.

"Oh! my lord," sobbed the minister, trying to pull himself together. "That wicked bare-legged rogue has wrought me great scaith. These caterans are a great affliction, my lord. They eat up the land like locusts, yea like beasts of prey they howl and devour."

"Nay, nay," returned Montrose with a twinkle. "Methinks they leave the howling to others. Are you hurt?"

"By God's infinite mercy and grace I have escaped without wound," answered the minister, crestfallen that he had not so much as a scratch to show for his outcry. "But my very life was in jeopardy. Nothing but the providential coming of your lordship prevented the heathen rascal from making a dead man of me. Saw you the red gleam of his dirk? Oh! 'Twas a fearful sight, a fearful sight. You remember me, my lord?" he ended with a cluck, as if choking in the thick of his miseries.

"Perfectly well, Mr. George Halyburton," returned Montrose. "We were at Aberdeen and other places together."

"Blessed be the Lord, he remembereth," ejaculated Mr. Halyburton. "We were, as you say, at Aberdeen together. You may recall it was there my happy privilege to offer your lordship certain suggestions anent——"

"Suggestions!" interrupted Montrose. "Wherefore so modest? What I have remembrance of are the commands of yourself and your reverend brethren to sack and burn the town I have taken."

"Commands, my lord!" cried Mr. Halyburton in well-feigned amazement.

"Commands," repeated Montrose, with an accent of sternness. "I recall moreover that when I demurred to the wanton shedding of blood, I was threatened with dire displeasures and penalties. As I still proved obdurate, you, sir, and the Christian ministers with you, made complaint to the Convention of Estates that I had shamefully neglected the purging by fire and by sword. Believe me, I have every reason to remember you quite clearly. Will you answer me one question honestly?"

"Any question, my lord," returned the trembling divine. "Any question your lordship may be pleased to ask of me."

"Pray tell me, then," said Montrose, "are you still of the same mind concerning the manifest and bounden duty of him who wins a battle? I am not skilled in casuistry, but as a plain man it seems to me that what the Kirk could bless at Aberdeen she can scarce ban at Perth, or as the homely proverb has it, 'What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'" For a moment it seemed that Mr. Halyburton had been suddenly seized with ague.

"My memory serves me in yet another particular," pursued Montrose in cold, quiet tones. "I have the most thorough remembrance of the most excellent exhortations of my many chaplains of those days. For how many a rousing and blood-thirsty discourse am I not your Reverence's debtor! Yet I mind me that

the Master instructs us gently to pray thus, *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*. 'Tis a most significant marrow-searching petition, and uttered by men skilled in divinity like yourself must have pertinent force. You catch my meaning? The wheel of Fortune turns giddily. What would your thoughts be if some of those for whose blood you then clamoured, citing Holy Scripture as your warrant, were forthwith to appear claiming that nothing but the practical application of your own sweet creed would meet the ends of justice? As between man and man answer me honestly."

"My lord, my lord," cried the unhappy minister, his teeth chattering, his eyes full of despairing appeal. "We all need mercy."

"So," said Montrose, "'twas my belief then; 'tis my belief now. Wherefore I am loath to imitate those preachers of peace who urge the slaughtering of their opponents. You are in some peril; and judging by your looks, scarce ready to go."

"Go where, my lord?"

"Why, go hence. I would not have you quit mortality an instant before the time. 'Tis a perilous adventure at best, methinks, and I perceive the gory business of war has somewhat intermitted your devotions."

It chanced that at that moment Colkitto passed near and Montrose called to him. "Macdonald," said the General urbanely, "let me present to you Mr. George Halyburton, minister of Perth, come out to see the battle and somewhat confused by events. Give him safe conduct to his home, where if he be pleased to abide our coming, we will have a word with him by and by."

Interrupted in his plundering, Colkitto glowered blackly on the minister. "I fear this man, my lord," said the hapless Mr. Halyburton, who had heard of Macdonald as a wolf without mercy.

"The more need of a seemly walk," responded Montrose. "Hark ye, a word in your ear. 'Tis a friend says it were well to do as he bids with alacrity, for indeed he hath an abrupt way with those who oppose him."

With that he bowed and went off, leaving the minister to the tender mercies of Colkitto.

Alastair did not stand upon ceremony. "Here," he called to two of his men. "Take this snivelling knave to Perth. If he kick, you know what to do."

"Good sir," returned Mr. Halyburton in a fresh tremor. "If these gentlemen will but indicate their wishes I will instantly obey."

"'Twill be best," said Colkitto contemptuously. "Off with him," he said to his men. "Off with him." With which he turned on his heel, muttering angrily over the interruption.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLOTTER'S HAND

THE prize of the Royalists was nothing less than the city of Perth, ancient capital of the kingdom of Scotland, with a multitude of overflowing larders and wine-cellars and a great wealth of movable gear. It was a delectable change, after the bracken bed and the sheiling fare of barley bannock and cold-water brose, to sit tight and dry at the tables of affluent burghers with a fine taste in capons, pullets, pasties, sirloin, and other creature comforts. Preparations had been made for a great feast in celebration of Elcho's victory when he should return from the pursuit and destruction of the enemy. The feast was held with vociferous rejoicing, but the guests, alas ! were not the bidden nor the expected. One thing only fell out as pre-arranged, namely, that the Reverend George Halyburton said grace—grace for the malignants. The poor man was direly distressed and went through the business with a wry enough face. His mood was rather to curse than to bless ; but the Highlanders significantly laid out their dirks as carving-knives, and Mr. Halyburton was not without the wisdom of discretion.

The news of the rout and possession of Perth brought the Convention of Estates together in Edinburgh in a consternation which quickly turned to red-hot wrath. What unimaginable failure of courage, or generalship, or both, had allowed the arch-heretic and traitor to win the stronghold of the Covenant ? He ought to have been annihilated, he ought to have been destroyed utterly. He ought indeed ; by every rule of war his mad course ought to be ended.

Angry and reproachful letters were despatched demanding an instant explanation, and adding stern hints of judgment to come if it were not satisfactory. Some of the wire-pullers in Edinburgh were for the grim expedient of holding the ministers as well as the generals responsible. Here, indeed, was a pretty pickle for saints in distress. Mr. John Robertson, Mr. Halyburton's brother minister in Perth, quivering in shame and mortification, answered by an indictment of all who carried arms that day for the Covenant. The much-trying man informed the Convention that for "suddantie and unexpectedness" this little feat of Montrose and his ill-conditioned rascals was as the clap of judgment. How are mere men and ministers to fend off the clap of judgment?

Shamefacedly, yet with a certain heat of indignation, Mr. Robertson owned that being "exanimate with fear and destitute of counsel," friendless and desperately afraid, poor men, he and his associates could not withstand "the hell-hounds routing with hideous cries for blood." It made the minister shiver to hear them, shiver and keep discreetly within his chamber, lest a stray Highland dirk or an irresponsible Irish musket should bring more claps of judgment. With a keen bitterness he complained that in the moment of stress the much-vaunted chivalry of Fife proved no better than a pack of arrant cowards. Of the valiant gentlemen of that shire there remained but one, and he, in the extremity of his plight, made haste to drown his woes in Covenanting liquor.

Neither did the shire of Perth stand to its pikes; so that Montrose and his ragged-backs, being deaf to reason and blind to pity, "we began to think upon surrendering the city (having nothing else for it, God help us!), if on any terms we could have our conscience and our covenants preserved entire." If these were threatened the ministers undauntedly gave counsel "to lose life and all, which was accorded to by all the town council." Puissant town council! You are, to picture councilmen and ministers in the throes of desperation resolutely clapping to church and chamber

door and vowing to win or perish. But gentler thoughts prevailed, perhaps from a better understanding of the character and methods of Major-General Alastair Macdonald, to whom fell the task of making terms and conditions. At any rate, the town was surrendered without drop of blood spilt, and the minister of Perth, snorting in chagrin, pertinently wound up by proposing this nice question for the gracious consideration of the Committee of Estates, namely, whether "the rendering of the field or the town was the most disgraceful and prejudicial?"—a poser which is still without answer.

Three days the victorious General abode in the captured city, his men encamped on that famous Inch which has so often been crimson with the blood of Scotland's best and bravest. This he did to the end that friends professing an ardent love for the king might make their professions good by joining his standard. But loyalty oftentimes waits cannily on interest. It was expecting too much of a feeble and wavering faith to believe all at once in this miracle of Montrose. Better bide a wee to see what the morrow would bring. Only folly rashly ventures life and fortune. So the majority waited prudently what might betide.

Galled and sick at heart, despite his victory, Montrose crossed the Tay to Cupar in Angus, encamping in the open fields by the ancient Cistercian ruins of Cupar Abbey. Here, to his infinite joy, there joined him young Lord Duplin, future Earl of Kinnoul, with his younger brother, William Hay, also future Earl and hero of the Cause. There came likewise Sir Thomas Ogilvie, son of the Earl of Airlie, son-in-law of brave old Patrick Ruthven, Earl of Brentford and Forth, friend and lieutenant of Gustavus Adolphus. Brentford had trained his daughter's husband in war, finishing him off a soldier in whom the heart of Montrose was to delight. With these were other Ogilvies and Grahams and several gentlemen of Gowrie, some of them of a dubious sort. Resting a moment by the abbey ruin, Montrose made a hasty entertainment for his officers. The banquet, if it merit so fine a name, was a politic attempt to keep his incohesive, often antagonistic units

together in some semblance of an army. It was not given, God knows, because he had himself any heart for gaiety, but because he well knew that cheerfulness is infectious and a smile the best incentive to courage. And here of many dark tales comes one of the darkest.

Among the General's dearest guests was the young heir of Menteith, who brought with him as devoted friend and henchman one for ever infamous, one utterly unworthy of his name—James Stewart of Ardvoirlich—as it proved a minion and spy of Argyle. This creature had for some time been the bosom companion and counsellor of young Kilpont, against all the warnings of his father the Earl, who ever doubted the man. He was with Kilpont at Buchanty, and for reasons of his own, of Argyle's, and the Covenant's, not only assented to, but pressed, the going over to Montrose. In spite of his readiness to take a hand in destroying Colkitto, Kilpont, like all his house, was a staunch Royalist. Ardvoirlich was—what we shall see.

According to the jovial custom of the age, the senior officers passed the night with the bottle, Montrose being almost alone in his abstinence. When they went off to their quarters a little before the dawn they were heated and quarrelsome. Colkitto and Ardvoirlich exchanged civilities for old times' sake, and swords were out almost as quickly as words were spoken. Montrose himself struck up the blades and insisted that the brawlers should shake hands. Macdonald had a giant's grip, but for all that Ardvoirlich, taking him unaware, made the blood squirt from his finger-tips. Astonished and angered, Colkitto shook the lamed hand a moment, spattering the blood in Stewart's face.

"Ardvoirlich," he said, with an oath, "no man does the like of that to me twice. We'll meet again, you and me, when there's none to come between us."

"Eh God, man, I can't tell ye how my stomach hungers for the time," retorted Ardvoirlich, a foolish speech, which would have brought the angry rebuke of Argyle had he heard it.

"For shame, gentlemen!" cried Montrose. "For shame! Has friendship no end but to quarrel?"

At that Kilpont (a sapling beside the gnarled oak) slipped his arm into Ardvoirlich's, and the two went off to the tent they shared together, Colkitto still shaking his injured hand in token of vengeance. Those who heard his growl and understood the cause pitied Ardvoirlich. There was more need to pity and protect Colkitto.

The passion of revenge and the blind hope of gain made havoc of Ardvoirlich's discretion. Always unruly in anger, he was now in a kind of indiscriminate rage, yet there was in his fury a singular admixture of cunning, as though the fox were blended with the wolf.

"Eh, Lord of Heaven, but I'm hot!" he exclaimed, throwing back his bonnet and exposing his forehead to the night air. "Come down by the kirk here, Kilpont; it looks quiet and cool there."

They went down in the dark by the kirk of Collace, Ardvoirlich all the while railing and spluttering out his wrath. Of a sudden his tone changed.

"Well, well," he said. "'Tis an ill wind'—you know the proverb. Kilpont, what we sought we have found. The time has come to do what we are here for."

Kilpont drew up and disengaged his arm. In the light of the stars he could see the eyes blazing in Ardvoirlich's craned face.

"What we are here for?" he repeated, in surprise.

"Tuts, man!" returned Ardvoirlich in a hoarse whisper, bending so close that Kilpont could feel his hot, liquorish breath. "Can it be you have forgotten already? That's what comes of drinking. Thank God the drink doesn't take away my memory. Look you! the night is the night if the men are the men."

He stopped for an answer, but as it did not come immediately, he resumed, "Kilpont, gracious Lord, but it's hot!" mopping his brow with his coat-sleeve. "Kilpont, I want to see you where you ought to be."

"And where is that?" asked Kilpont, his blood beginning to run cold.

"Can you ask?" was the rejoinder. "Do kites and kestrels rule the eagle? Is the future Earl of

Menteith fit only for second fiddle, like a hanger-on at a feast? Kilpont, am I your friend or am I not?"

"You are my very good friend," replied Kilpont, shivering a little in his perplexity.

"Your hand on it," said Ardvoirlich, breathing thickly through his nostrils. "By Heaven, sir, that's a fit hand to pull down and set up thrones. There's the stuff in that hand to crown and uncrown kings. Kilpont, I want to see the man that owns it where he should be. I want to see him taking the honours to himself that others are stealing now."

"You are ill," said Kilpont. "Your hand burns fearfully."

"Ill," repeated Ardvoirlich with a sort of clucking gurgle. "Ill, by Heaven I tell you I was never better in my life. My hand burns, you say. I would you could feel my heart. That's where the burning is. But have done with havers. How long are James Graham and Alastair Macdonald to strut like sovereign princes? Think, my lord, think, think."

"I do not understand," answered Kilpont, with a sudden sickness of misgiving.

"It's the drink," rejoined Ardvoirlich. "As sure as I'm a poor and injured man I would give all I'm worth ten times over to be in your shoes this night."

"It may be as you say, Ardvoirlich," said Kilpont, "that the drink is to blame, but upon my honour I do not catch your meaning."

Ardvoirlich paused a moment, looked round craftily, and then clutched his friend's arm.

"This is not for every bird that likes to listen," he said. "Come down by a bit yet;" and with that he led the way into the very shadow of the kirk. "Now," says he, drawing himself up. "As between you and me and the grave let us settle this thing."

"You puzzle me more and more," returned Kilpont with affected lightness. "What thing?"

"Hist," whispered Ardvoirlich. "Is some one coming? No, 'tis but the wind. The hot mind makes its own bogles. You ask me what thing? Tuts, are we afraid of words? But what the tongue cannot

“speak the hand can do. Think what Argyle expects of us.”

“What Argyle expects of us,” repeated Kilpont. “What can he expect of us except what he is getting?”

“Is it giff-gaff we’re at like bairns at their play?” demanded Ardvoirlich, a note of resentment in his voice. “I ask you plain, man, how long James Graham and Alastair Macdonald are to stand in the way? You and I have tholed more than I care to think of for this chance. It has come. Let us do our part and get our reward.”

A cold shuddering horror passed through Kilpont.

“You mean,” he responded, “to kill them?”

“If I knew of a surer way of being rid of them, depend on it I would be for taking it,” said Ardvoirlich.

“Have you come from Argyle to do that?” asked Kilpont in a quivering voice.

“You ask queer questions, my friend,” was the reply.

“But since it’s the whimsy of the moment to be putting them, let me ask you this: Is there no master in the world better worth serving than Montrose, ay, or King Charles either. Broken men, Kilpont, broken men, that’s what they are, both of them.”

He spoke with extraordinary intensity. His whole frame seemed to heave with emotion; his eyes shone in the dark like a cat’s.

“Now,” he said huskily, “which will you take? Name your man. Though if it’s all the same I’m for letting you have Montrose. It will be a bit of agreeable work for myself to deal with Colkitto.”

“What, man, and undo all?” said Kilpont in a panting horror.

The other changed as in a flash.

“It’s not for going back you are, is it?” he demanded, a clear menace in his tone. “Kilpont, look you, we are come too far to turn. It’s further we must go.”

“Never,” replied Kilpont, all the emphasis of outraged honour in his voice. “Never. Ardvoirlich, this is madness, sheer madness. Something has turned

your brain. You do not understand what horrible and monstrous thing it is you propose."

"Horrible and monstrous," repeated Ardvoirlich, in a husky pant. "Horrible and monstrous. I never concerned myself with talk about the horrible and monstrous. Come, come, no more of this. We dally when we ought to be doing. It cannot be that Kilpont is shaking at the knees. Look you, they are both in their tents now. It wants yet an hour of dawn, the darkest hour, the fittest hour."

"This is some insane jest," returned Kilpont, trembling in every fibre. "Come, let us get rid of the nightmare by a brisk walk and an hour's sleep," and he turned as if to go.

"Stop," said Ardvoirlich hoarsely. "This is neither an insane jest nor yet a nightmare. It's as serious as death. I ask you again which man you are going to take?"

"I tell you it is rank madness," returned Kilpont. "And infamy as well. Let us get out of this."

"You would betray me," said Ardvoirlich, bending closer. His voice was thick as the voice of one who struggles with a choking sensation, his eyes were red, his whole being seemed swollen with passion.

"It is you who would betray," returned Kilpont, great beads of sweat breaking on his forehead. "But let it end."

"You are bent on going?"

"I am bent on going. We have already stayed too long."

Ardvoirlich put forth his hand to stop Kilpont; but it was indignantly thrust aside. In the same instant as it appeared, the rejected hand rose and there was the dark flash of steel. "Take that," grunted Ardvoirlich, driving the dagger home to the hilt.

"My God!" ejaculated Kilpont, reeling to the ground. "James, James, what have you done?"

For answer Ardvoirlich placed his foot on the fallen man and struck again and yet again, growling like a wild beast. Then with the speed of a deer he was off into the night.

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING SPIES

A MINUTE later a cry of mingled alarm and pain rang through the camp. The assassin, finding an Irish sentry in his way, cut the man down, almost cleaving him in two. The gruesome noise of the death throes, half gurgle, half groan, directed the man's comrades to the spot, where they found him in a gory welter. But his gaspings were immediately drowned by cries of consternation and rage over a yet direr tragedy.

Hearing the clamour, Montrose rushed from his tent, thinking that the Highlanders and Irish were again at their brawls. With an angry exclamation he pushed into the midst of a confused knot of men, who appeared to be beside themselves with excitement.

"What disturbance have we now?" he demanded. "Fie, cannot we have peace among ourselves even for one night?"

At that the men shrank back, disclosing a spectacle which struck him dumb and cold. For what he saw was the body of his young friend stretched on the ground, its crimson dishevelment made weird and ghastly by the red uncertain light of torches. Colkitto, who chanced to be afoot and had run at the first note of tumult, was on bended knee supporting the fallen head. At the sound of Montrose's voice he looked up.

"Here's bonnie work, my lord," he said. "Ay, bonnie work," he repeated, with a meaning and terrible grimness.

Montrose took a torch and hastily examined the prostrate form. "Lift him, lift him," he said with a

hard sharp breath. "Fetch the surgeon. Haste, haste."

"My lord," answered Colkitto, "there is no manner of need. He is beyond the aid of leech. This minute he breathed his last in my arms."

"My God, dead!" exclaimed Montrose, in a stricken voice.

"Dead, my lord," said Colkitto.

"Who has done this thing?" demanded Montrose.

"See that the villain escapes not."

Colkitto laid the dead man's head softly on the earth and rose to his feet.

"That, too, is needless," he said. "There, my lord, you have a token of the loyalty and friendship of James Stewart of Ardvoirlich. Last night you would not permit me to deal with the man. To-day he leaves your dearest friend weltering in blood. That is his return for your kindness."

"How know you it was James Stewart?" asked Montrose.

"Kilpont faltered but a word," answered Colkitto. "Yet was it enough, for it told who did the deed. Moreover, I have to inform your Excellency that this deed, black as it is, is not all. The murderer in his flight killed one of my sentries who tried to stop him. My pikemen are out after him, but what avails a chase in the dark. Gledes should be shot, my lord; gledes should be shot when they are within range."

"Had he an accomplice?" said Montrose, hardly able to believe that the whole tale of villainy was not a dream.

"It was his own sole act," returned Colkitto. "His own hand did it. He and he alone first decoyed the Lord Kilpont, then betrayed and stabbed him to death in this lonely spot."

"Oh! cowardly traitor and villain," cried Montrose in a voice of piercing anguish, "thus to betray trust and honour and friendship. May the vengeance of Heaven overtake him."

"It were speedier, methinks, if the vengeance of earth overtook him," observed Colkitto. "I have told my

men that if they find him they need bring me nothing but his head."

"His head a thousand times would not atone for this atrocity," said Montrose. And with that, kneeling suddenly, he embraced his dead friend in such a passion of love and grief that the roughest beholder was melted.

The whole army had marked the ardent and romantic attachment between the General and his youthful lieutenant. Nevertheless, it was amazed and overcome at the sight of this great tenderness in the swift and terrible warrior. And as his men stared in awed silence, there rose to his lips the proud and piercing wail of that immortal song of the Bow, which another great-hearted warrior caused to be taught to the children of Judah, *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.*

He took off his cloak and with his own hand tenderly wrapped it about the dead man, covering his face so that the anguish of his departure might be hidden. That done, he rose and spoke to his followers.

"By the foulness of a treachery which I have no words to describe," he said, "the king has this morning lost a true and faithful subject, brave as the eagle, prompt as the falcon, the very type and model of an honest gentleman and a valiant soldier. I thought to see him reap a harvest of glory by service to his king, but here at the outset he lies slain by perfidy and dishonour. This foul murder is testimony before God against the murderer."

"Ay, ay, my lord, that it is, and before man too," cried a voice by his side, and, pressing in, Macnab lifted the edge of the cloak and dipped the point of his dagger in blood. "I lift this to Heaven in token of vengeance," he added fiercely, raising the crimson point above his head. "Be it mine to see the dead avenged, ay, though it take ten years and cost a thousand lives. But, my lord," turning a lurid face on Montrose, "James Stewart of Ardvoirlich is not alone in this. Believe me, there are others who are art and part in this foul crime. When he drove his dirk into that bosom,"

and he pointed to Kilpont's lifeless body, "he was working the will of him who sent him. Somebody behind, my lord, somebody behind."

"Think you so, Macnab?" returned Montrose, with the expression of one who gets confirmation of his own dark suspicion.

"Tut," responded Macnab, with a knowing air, "were my eyes opened for the first time yesterday? Have I not lived on the borders of Argyle all the days and nights of my life, except when I was across the hills here and there fighting, as God wots it proper to a man of spirit, or maybe troking a bit in cattle, or chasing rogues with a gift of mistaking other people's gear for their own? We learn many a thing by the banks of the Dochart; and, my lord, to speak plain to you, hang me on the nearest tree for ravens to peck at if Archibald Campbell's hand is not in this."

"That is a hard saying, Macnab, even of an enemy," said Montrose. "But we will talk further of it anon. Our present duty lies in honour to him whom a nameless infamy has struck down in the very bloom and prime of his youth. Friends," he went on, addressing Kilpont's retainers, "take up your beloved chief, and bear him home to lie with his kindred. Ah! that youth and valour should have this untimely fall. Methinks half my heart dies with him. Tell the Earl, his father, how we mourn for the early and tragic setting of a star that rose with so much promise of lustre. Speak softly in his ear of our grief; it may somewhat ease his own. Macdonald, let the drums beat, and the pipes play a coronach; a braver piece of manhood never went hence."

He paused to recover command of himself, and then, as though he could not help the outpouring of feeling, went on, "Farewell, noble friend, faithful soldier and comrade, farewell. Thou hast won thy place in the pantheon of the brave and the true. We can but falter after thee. Thy memory, the vision of thy face, bright as yon rising sun, eager as the war-horse wherever there was need of courage, will be our heritage. In trial and difficulties we will bear ourselves the better

for having known thee. Farewell, till we meet again, farewell."

"Macdonald," he said, turning as though to hide his emotion, "I go to write a brief message to his father. Piteous old man, I fear me much for the bleeding of his heart over this day's work. Then, Macnab, if you please, we will have further speech concerning the thing you spoke of. It is a matter that touches us all closely."

The sun shone as though all the world should laugh, when by and by his vassals, most of them in tears, took up the dabbled, mangled body of Kilpont. Presently Montrose delivered his written message, and a mournful procession formed, the pipers leading with a wail for the dead, and the General following for a space bare-headed. On the outskirts of the camp the parting took place, the pipers wheeling and playing the drooping *cortège* past. Then Montrose, feeling as if indeed half his heart were dead, returned to his quarters, Macnab and the other Highland chiefs accompanying him.

"Gentlemen," he said with a sigh, when at last they were in council, "ten ordinary lives would be cheap in exchange for the life we have lost this day. And you have all heard Macnab's words anent our enemy's part in the infamous thing. I profess I can scarce believe it. Macnab, are you sure of your own thoughts? Mayhap the cantrip imagination working on a natural hate has duped and misled you."

"My lord," replied Macnab, in no manner displeased at being thus the centre of attention in an affair so momentous, "am I sure of the breath I draw, or the feet I stand on?"

"Be pleased then to give us the grounds of your assurance," said the Marquis. "For I tell you honestly that much as I know of the dishonour of him you implicate, this instance of his handiwork puts belief to confusion. Why, sir, it is not the doing of a man at all, it is the doing of a fiend."

"My lord," rejoined Macnab briskly, "I have myself found it hard whiles to make out between the man and the fiend. Touching what I say, if you do not find it true, whilk is to say, my lord, if upon due and sufficient

inquiry it does not appear that the said James Stewart of Ardvoirlich is at this present moment of speaking hot foot on his way to Argyle, and will be with him ere the rising of to-morrow's sun, then never again give heed to thought or word of Alan Macnab."

"I have no notion of putting Alan Macnab's good faith to any such proof," replied Montrose, smiling wanly. "But Ardvoirlich may find himself checkmated. You have heard that our pikemen are after him."

"My lord," said Macnab, "your pikemen might as well be supping brose at their ease. James Stewart is not the sort of muir fowl to be kitted with a broomstick. I am not saying," he added, hastily catching Colkitto's eye, "that the men are not good men and brave hunters. What I mean is this, that the stag is up and off with the wind of them. Ardvoirlich will go his way, and Archibald of the red-head will receive him with open arms and kill the fatted calf for him."

"Gentlemen, you hear," said Montrose, looking at Inchbrakie, Struan, and the rest. "What say you to Macnab's words? Athole and Argyle are not strangers to each other. Struan, what think you?"

"That Macnab's words have a marvellous colour of truth," was the answer.

"Colour of truth," cried Macnab, swelling yet still more. "I tell you it is true as Holy Scripture. My good neighbour Baldy of the squint has a long, long arm in the dark. God's sake, what but a miracle and mercy of Providence saved your Excellency? Kilpont was not the man the sweet knaves wanted out of the way. It is in my mind they lifted their eyes to higher game."

"You speak in riddles," said Montrose.

"Faith, 'tis too plain for a riddle," replied Macnab. "But if your lordship must have blunt words, 'tis Alan Macnab's honest opinion that but for the mishap to Kilpont, the king would at this minute have cause to be somewhat deeper in mourning, which is to say, my lord, that if Archibald Campbell's little plan had not miscarried the Marquis of Montrose, ay, and Alastair Macdonald too, would now be as Kilpont is."

“Say you so, say you so?” responded Montrose, in an agitation that showed his distress of mind. “Ah!” pressing his brows wearily, “’tis nothing to fight an open and honourable foe, but who shall guard against darkness and the assassin?”

He took a turn in the shrewd morning air to cool his beating brain. “Pate,” he said, pulling up suddenly before Inchbrakie. “You are silent, what say you to all this?”

“Recall the events at Scone after the doings at Balloch three and a half years ago,” replied Inchbrakie. “To whom, my lord, did Montrose, Napier, Keir and Blackhall, owe their experience of the dungeons of Edinburgh Castle? One of them came forth with the hangman for guide. Think you the others, and particularly the king’s General, would not have gone the same gate had the Campbell had his way? Forget not that for all his craven cowardice there is not in all this realm of Britain a craftier or more daring plotter than the gleyed Argyle.”

“I have, indeed, found him subtle and far-reaching in intrigue,” said Montrose, like one reluctantly owning a loathsome truth. “But that he should, like a back-alley dictator in Alsatia, hire assassins for his cut-throat work is well-nigh past all credence.”

“Be sure,” rejoined Inchbrakie, “that what Gillespie Gruamach can accomplish by guile, he will never attempt by honourable or open means. As to fighting, pah, he could burn the House of Airlie above Lady Ogilvie’s head when there was none to defend save flunkies and kitchen wenches; but he will render you a thousand sufficient reasons for not leading his men to battle. In one thing he excelleth all past masters; the art of managing spies and agents. My lord, they are bribing and seducing your adherents; they have penetrated your camp; nay, they have supped with you, shared your confidence, learned your plans, and, while partaking of your hospitality, schemed for your life.”

“Yet he once professed to be my friend,” said Montrose.

“Friend to you as Brutus was to Cæsar, while you

were not in the way of his ambition," returned Inch-brakie. "The moment you cast your shadow on his path, he took Brutus's way to be rid of you, lacking nothing of Brutus's spirit but the courage."

"Your words are sharper than a sword, Pate," remarked Montrose. "But 'tis ever true that the friend turned enemy hates with a thrice embittered hatred."

All this while Colkitto stood a little apart, his arms folded, his head thrown back, his left foot thrust forward, his whole look and attitude expressing haughtiness and contempt. He could not easily forgive Montrose for interfering in the quarrel between himself and Ardvoirlich, which deprived him of the gratification of a personal revenge. Had he been allowed to deal out summary justice, James Stewart would not now be making for the camp of Argyle with two dead men to his account.

"Has the Major-General nothing to say?" asked Montrose, noting his mien.

Colkitto unfolded his arms, lowered his crest by a nail's breadth and stood squarely on both feet.

"Your Excellency," he replied drily, "the Major-General has been vastly edified by listening."

"Edified?" repeated Montrose, his eyebrows lifted in surprise.

"Are we not all edified, my lord, when others confirm our private judgments?" 'Tis the most agreeable way in the world of discovering our own wisdom. To some of us our friends here," indicating the company in general, "have said nothing that is new, though they have spoken much that is true."

"You think so?"

"Nay, it has gone far beyond thinking with me. Look you, my lord, is there anything more convincing than experience? I have myself witnessed something of the honesty of Argyle, ay, and tasted his hospitality to strangers. Do not the burnt ribs of my boats lie at Ardnamurchan point as a memorial of his friendship? He was careful that having once set foot on his domains neither I nor my men should lack entertainment, but I have this to say, my lord, that if the blaze of my boats gladdened him, the smoke of his roofs heartened me."

"When Macdonald strikes, he strikes with terror," returned Montrose. "But your opinion touching the murder of Kilpont? It is the king's business and concerns all his officers. You have heard what our friends here say."

"I have, my lord."

"And what think you?"

"Why, that they have read a plain truth plainly. My lord, must a man hit thrice ere he be understood? For me somewhat less suffices. Kilpont had one fault."

"A man compact of virtue would have almost as many. What was it?"

"A too obliging ear, my lord. He believed what was told to him. Old Menteith, his father, I warrant knows a trick worth two of that."

"Honour sees its own reflection in every face," said Montrose. "How know you that these gentlemen have divined the truth?"

"By the very best of testimony," replied Colkitto. "The dying word of Kilpont."

Montrose gave a little start. "The dying word of Kilpont?" he repeated.

"Even so, my lord. It chanced that I was taking the morning air somewhat earlier than the common, having things on my mind to banish sleep, which your lordship may guess of. I was with Kilpont the minute he was struck down. The death gurgle was already choking him, but I bent my ear to his mouth and heard with his last breath that he died because he would not turn traitor, which is to say, my lord, because he would have you and me live a little while longer."

"What did I tell your Excellency?" cried Macnab. "Do you see the double hand now, my lord?"

"I seem to see a world suddenly turned to nightmare," replied Montrose. "Macdonald, your words appear to imply that a plot was fomented against your life and mine."

"That was Kilpont's dying word, my lord."

"Ay, ay, you see the whole game now, my lord," put in the irrepressible Macnab. "The thing's as plain as a roadside gibbet. Thinking the time had come to

do his master's bidding and settle some private accounts forby, Ardvoirlich tried to inveigle Kilpont. To that end he took him down by in the dark to speak quietly with him, and being very likely told what we know he is, did to our dear friend as Joab, the son of Zeruiah, did to Abner and Amasa. 'Tis pretty sport kittling under the fifth rib with a dirk. My lord, I have read the Scriptures according to the blessed King James. Let me be to Ardvoirlich what Benaiah was to Joab, ay, though he take shelter by the very altar of Argyle."

"Not an ill-notion at all," quoth Colkitto. "Ah! there I spy my men returning, but I cannot discern the head of Ardvoirlich. With your Excellency's leave I will go and examine them."

CHAPTER X

MAN'S DEFECTION AND WOMAN'S LOYALTY

IN a few minutes he was back, saying that Macnab had proved too good a prophet. Aided by the darkness Ardvoirlich had evaded or outrun his pursuers, and was then doubtless speeding happily on his way to his master Argyle, bursting to report the deed of infamy. In high feather over this fresh confirmation of his views, Macnab again claimed the privilege of the avenger. This would be convenient and appropriate, inasmuch as he had some private scores to settle with the Macailein Mohr, to say nothing of smaller ones with Ardvoirlich himself. Besides, he and his friends thought of utilising the lull by running home, as he expressed it, "to see that the thatch is still on our roofs, snod our bits of places, kiss our wives and brats, whet our blades and be back before the running Covenanters get up stomach to turn about for another fight."

"Ay," remarked Colkitto, throwing his head in the air. "Yet for all the desperate hurry I'll warrant it's jogging by drove-roads you'll be. It would be sinful waste of good beef to drive fat cattle too hard."

"Tuts," responded Macnab, choosing for once to ignore the offence in Colkitto's tone, "when a thing lies to your hand are you to give it the go-by like a churl without any sense? Our very good friend Alastair is pleased to make a jest. Well and good. But as touching our present home-going and the driving of a pickle cattle, will he give one good reason for letting them wander ownerless on the lowlands of Perth? To my mind the brute beasties need a home like the rest of us."

"For which excellent and sufficient reason, you will have compassion and drive them to the empty byres of Athole and Strathday," said Colkitto, "not to speak of the bonnie fields of Stronaclachan and Glendochart. A great kindness to be sure. Only take care that the Argyle men do not come round about that way in autumn as they did in spring. For my own part, my lord, this thought comes into my head: Have I and my men crossed the seas and seen our boats burnt just that Covenanting cattle may fatten on the green sides of Ben More and Ben-Y-Gloe? You see 'tis a kittler matter than one might think. I must take counsel on it with my cousin the Earl of Antrim and the brave lads from Laggan and Bann."

"Let the Macdonald have his share," said Struan warmly. "Let him take beast for beast with us."

"Ay, ay," rejoined Macdonald, "and eat them as they stand, horn, hoof and hide, or tuck them in his sporan. You see, Macdonald's pastures are a good bit away and hard to win at."

"And may be bare feeding when they are reached," said Struan, lifting his chin.

"For all that I wouldn't wonder if they raise as good stock as any vale in Athole," retorted Colkitto. "Yet is there some faint notion of justice in what the Thane of Struan says. I mind me, my lord, that when David, King of Israel, whom I most heartily and truly reverence as a mighty man of war and a scourge to his enemies; when this same David, I say, was somewhat perplexed anent the precise matter now brought before your Excellency he decided thus—the spoil to be divided, share and share alike. Your Excellency, who read the Bible with the pious Covenanters, will recall the instance."

"Perfectly," replied Montrose serenely. "Perfectly. But not because I read my Bible under guidance of the Convention of Estates."

"Macdonald should cite fairly," said Struan.

"If the Thane of Struan," returned Macdonald, with a high look, "or any other Highland gentleman now present is dissatisfied——"

"Nay, nay," broke in Montrose. "None talks of

dissatisfaction. As to the Bible instance, David established a principle of war which all civilised commanders have ever since followed."

"I thank your lordship," said Macdonald, bowing.

"This little matter of cattle-driving was mentioned by me," put in Macnab. "With your Excellency's permission I have to observe that my badge is the sprig of heather, now bound with the oat stalk to signify that I am a king's man and a follower of your lordship. Moreover, on my banner for all eyes to see is this motto or brief superscription, '*Dread Naught.*'"

"A good badge, a most excellent motto," said Colkitto derisively. "It is the simple truth no man could desire better."

"Which have never been lowered or trampled by the foot of any enemy," said Macnab, now in a white rage. "If our very good friend Alastair Macdonald, look you, thinks that his blood is redder or his sword better than mine, I trust and pray and beseech he will do me the exceeding great pleasure of proving it to me."

"When and where would Macnab be pleased?" asked Colkitto, with a freezing politeness.

"And I humbly crave a like favour at Macdonald's hands," struck in young Murray, who still brooded over the insults in Athole.

"Two," said Macdonald coolly. "Together or one by one?"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," pleaded Montrose. "Do we win victories for the king only to quarrel among ourselves like thieves over the spoilzie? And this too while the body of our friend is scarce cold. Fie, fie!"

"You have seen, my lord, that the quarrel is not of my seeking," returned Colkitto. "Yet finding it thrust upon me somewhat rudely, I would be loath to run away. If your lordship be inclined to the Atholemen, I have this to say, that my Irish lads are already asking questions which I cannot very well answer."

In general Montrose's gentleness, courtesy and forbearance in dealing with the factious or the turbulent were the marvel of all who knew him in war. Yet he

understood well how to put on the imperious mien. Now as it seemed in an instant the boon companion, the smiling familiar friend, were lost in the stern-faced commander.

"We will ourselves see to this matter," he said curtly. "Let it be known that every man in his Majesty's army has similar and equal rights according to rank. Macdonald, I think there is somewhat in hand among your men from the gear taken in Perth. The traders of Dundee and the weavers of Glasgow mayhap will be prevailed on to yield more. It is our desire that in the results of victory all shall share alike, as seems most convenient—cattle here, money, silver, napery or other wares there. Inchbrakie, since custom decrees that your contingent goes home with its spoil, be pleased to direct that it go and return promptly. Macdonald, pray strike tents. We march forthwith."

"Into the Mearns, my lord?" asked Macdonald, all alert for action and plunder.

"Sir Thomas," said Montrose, turning to Ogilvie, "methinks the loyalty of Angus is somewhat too diffident and modest. Since my lord, the Earl of Argyle, still tarries, we will spend a brief space among our friends for their encouragement and our own gratification."

"It were well done, my lord," responded Ogilvie. "The sight of your lordship would give fresh pith to many a faint heart."

"I trust," said Montrose, addressing Macdonald, "that the Major-General agrees." This he said not because he would bate one jot of authority, but because he would fain conciliate.

"My lord," answered Macdonald promptly, "I am one who would be for finding out those who are with me and those who are against me. Sir Thomas Ogilvie speaks of faint hearts. If there be such as shrink from putting their dainty hands to sword, pike or musket in the king's cause, then methinks some persuasion of the right sort would be highly profitable."

"Excellently reasoned," said Montrose. "Meantime pending the development of events we visit Dundee,

where our friends have been summoning the garrisons of Fife to give us welcome."

The camp was soon in a hum of preparation. But before marching, Montrose had to witness not only the departure of four hundred men with the body of Kilpont, but at least as many more of the Northern clans going off with their herd of cattle. This reduction of his tiny force at a critical moment he bore with his customary cheerfulness as a thing inevitable. Well for him that he had a fund of buoyant philosophy, for a greater trial was at hand.

At the news of his approach the chivalry of Angus and Mearns fled like a country-side of boors. Of the nobility and men of rank whom he expected to rally to the king's cause there joined him but one, the old Earl of Airlie whose two sons, Sir Thomas and Sir David Ogilvie, were already with the royal standard. The third, James, Lord Ogilvie, lay among the rats in an Edinburgh dungeon.

Montrose hid his chagrin and his disappointment at finding only women and children where he hoped to find men of war. His eyes shone with very mixed feelings as he welcomed the old man in sight of the whole army.

"Thanks for this adhesion, my lord," he said. "I know not well how to say more. But in his Majesty's name, thanks."

"Alas, my lord," returned Airlie, indignation and sorrow mingled in his tone, "I come, as you see, almost alone. Save these two boys of mine," glancing at his sons, "and a few poor followers whose lives are the king's and your lordship's, I am without aid. Another who would fain be here pines in a Covenanting prison. But I warrant you, my lord, Jamie's heart is with us, however his arm may be restrained."

"No need to tell us that," responded Montrose quickly and cordially. "Well, some we wot of may yet have their fill of the dungeon-joys they deal out to others. It will be our business presently to make his jailers change places with Lord Ogilvie. But whom have we here, my lord?" spying a cloaked and hooded figure

in the rear. "A lady, I profess, where cavaliers fear to come."

"My daughter," replied Lord Airlie simply. "Kitty, come forward. My lord, I present to you a weak but loyal friend of Monarchy, one besides who in her orisons never forgets your lordship. She brings you a small gift, an insignificant thing, but her own and all she has. Accept it, my lord, as a pledge of a woman's loyalty. Kitty, my love, unfold it."

In an agitation which made her fingers tremble violently, Kitty unfolded a silken roll which next instant waved on the breeze, showing the royal arms emblazoned.

"For the king and the king's regent," she said, presenting it on bended knee. "Take it, my lord, take it, and God bless you."

With one hand he took the banner; with the other he raised her, looking straight into her eyes, which were wet with tears.

"The Lady Kitty consecrates a woman's devotion and puts man's defection to shame," he said with a thrilling emotion, "by this obeisance to the king's majesty and the presentation of this emblem of faith. The king shall know of it as fast as messenger can ride with the news. Meanwhile, in his name I return thanks." And bending over her hand which he still held, he kissed it reverently.

She gave him one look more elequent than a thousand speeches, and then all at once, as if awed by her own temerity, shrank back by her father's side. The Earl lovingly put up his hand and thrust back the hood as if jealous of aught that concealed her beauty.

"Let thy face be seen, dear child, when the occasion is the king's," he said, doting upon her like a lover. She looked up at him fondly, then glancing round the multitude of men, blushed rosily and shrank yet closer. Yet for all her timidity, there was that in her mien which spoke of a high heart.

All eyes were fixed upon her, in a curious yet respectful gaze. In age she could not have been more than eighteen, though she had already the look of a woman

well versed in the trials of the world. She had ridden hard with her father for this meeting ; and strands of her rich yellow hair were blown about her brows in coils and little ringlets. Her figure, though not commanding, suggested great litheness and hardiness. Her face, still rounded with the oval lines of girlhood, gave the impression at once of rare firmness and rare sweetness of temper.

"Her own fingers wrought it, my lord," said Airlie with a father's as well as a patriot's pride. "The midnight chimes have caught her busy over it. She saw the loose-jointed friends flying, and, poor child, must needs do what she could. Methinks chivalry is dead."

"Nay, nay, my lord of Airlie," returned Montrose, with a gracious inclination towards the shy but eager Kitty. "With this proof in my hand I will not have you say so. Chivalry is not dead. On the contrary, it is alive and flourisheth exceedingly. Behold the swell and ripple of it in this silken banner which I lift to the free wind of Heaven as testimony to all men of a woman's bravery and the honour of the House of Airlie." And suiting the action to the word he shook it out.

A great cheer rose spontaneously from the watching troops. Airlie lifted his feathered bonnet ; but Montrose had stepped forward bare-headed, and taking the Lady Kitty again by the hand, led her to the front. Thereupon he gave the command and the whole force saluted, fife and drum breaking into royal welcome.

"Oh, my lord," said Kitty, with an imploring look, "pray give me leave to retire." But he smilingly held her there till he had spoken to the troops and they had answered with shout upon shout of gladness.

"It is too much honour, my lord," said Airlie in a voice full of emotion when Kitty again stepped back beside him, her face aglow with bashfulness and pleasure.

"Say not that, my lord of Airlie," returned Montrose proudly. "In these times, when treason stalks abroad, can loyalty be too much honoured ? If the king were

here he would answer you 'Nay.' The Lady Kitty hath done a great thing for us this day."

"The thing is well enough, my lord," returned Airlie, unable to hide his gratification, "if there were swords enough to uphold it."

"The brave man will read in this token a moral for himself," said Montrose. "My lord of Airlie needs no discourse on the value of a high heart."

"Oh! my lord," cried Kitty, trembling and quivering for sheer joy and excitement, "we rejoice in your glory. May there be many a Tippermuir."

"May there be many a Lady Kitty," was the prompt and gallant response, "then would the Tippermuirs be swift and decisive. In the great time of old, Miriam wrought miracles. May our Miriam not only rouse the host but chant the song of victory." He turned to young William Hay, brother of Kinnoul already distinguished for gallantry. "Hay, to your hands I commit this ensign," he said. "See that it be well guarded."

Hay kneeled to receive it, and then, rising, looked straight at Montrose. "My lord, my life and it shall go together."

"Bravely answered," said his General. "The Lady Kitty will expect that vow to be kept."

Kitty's eyes, which had hitherto been fastened on Montrose's face, were now transferred to Hay's, her expression saying that she committed her treasure to him with confidence. Airlie drew her close beside him, and then, as if disdaining the subject of their talk, asked with some anxiety, "What of Huntly, my lord? Does he still hold back?"

"Huntly," was the reply, "hath a rancorous memory. He goes back to old events, giving them the colour and tenor of yesterday. My lord of Airlie, you too might be feeding fat a grudge. But your honour and your loyalty forbade."

"I never bowed the knee to Baal," replied the Earl, with unconscious pride. "What I am now I was from the beginning, and please God shall be to the end. They sought me in my glens, but did not find me; they wooed,

but I was deaf. What of that? I was older than your lordship. The cunning of Rothés, the luring tongue of Murray of Methven and others of their craft, work strange tricks with youth. I have observed, my lord, that honour being its own glass disdains to suspect and is often beguiled. If your lordship showed the Covenanting loons the trick of victory, why, I am not one who considers the foibles of youth too curiously. 'Tis enough for me to look forward in faith and hope."

"I would all were so just," replied Montrose. "If, in my mistaken youth, I committed the error of helping the enemy, be assured my repentance is thorough and sincere."

"Speak not of repentance, I pray you," rejoined Airlie. "Tippermuir suffices for repentance."

"'Tis generously said," observed Montrose. "As to Huntly, his perverse humour grieves me sorely. It is said he looks through jealous eyes. If it be so, let him come out and declare himself. I will willingly yield place to any man who will serve the king better than my poor abilities enable me to perform that wish of my heart."

"This realm of Scotland," said Airlie, looking at him steadily, "has but one man for the office your lordship holds. Wherefore no more of that. Yet would I gladly welcome Huntly. We have need of the brave Gordons."

"We have good hope they will join us presently," Montrose observed. "Huntly cannot say we do not demean ourselves and sue for his favour. We have sent him letters beseeching him as he loves the king to come. Never rebel was so hard to win. But there, there," he cried, with a quick change to lightness, "we keep the Lady Kitty listening to a most tedious talk of defection. She came with you, my lord; how does she return?"

"She rides attended by her page," replied the Earl.

"It were ill done after the honour she has done us to let her depart with an escort so meagre," said Montrose, bowing to the lady. "Our horse are not a great troop, yet hath the enemy furnished a steed or two.

Methinks we must devise a better escort. Murray, let the privilege be yours, and I pray you tarry not."

The young people looked at each other inquiringly, and then Murray, with eager and joyous alacrity, got ready for this onerous and unexpected duty.

CHAPTER XI

NO QUARTER

AFTER a backward glance to assure himself that Argyle was still observing his customary prudence in the rear, Montrose marched upon Dundee. But he had scarcely sighted it when intelligence reached him that Burleigh lay at Aberdeen with a large army made up of the scattered remnants of Tippermuir (furious, it was said, for revenge) and bands from the north, cajoled or coerced by the influence of Argyle.

Montrose's decision was instant. For many reasons a meeting with Burleigh would be extremely agreeable. The man had sat as president of the Scottish Parliament before which my lord was haled four years previously to answer charges of loyalty to his king ; and had been venomous in persecution. A higher reason weighed with him also, that this new force must be prevented from effecting a junction with Argyle. Yet again, there was credible information that the Gordons were taking part and lot with the Covenant. The thought of Gordon pipers heartening the Convention of Estates with "The Cock of the North" was not to be endured. Wherefore he wheeled back upon Aberdeen.

As usual the movement was a swoop. While the enemy still thought him beyond Esk he was master of the Brig o' Dee. That night he supped with the Covenanting Burnet of Leys. Burnet was so charmed with his guest that he must needs there and then make an offer of help, pressing upon him five thousand merks as a token of goodwill. But Montrose pleasantly waved the offer aside.

"Guests, Sir Thomas, must not be plunderers," he

said. "But since it is your pleasure to be generous we will take some arms and horse."

"Take them, my lord, take what suits you," Sir Thomas returned, glad to get off so cheaply in a matter which, on the plan of Argyle, would mean total confiscation if not hanging at his own gate. Montrose took the gifts and departed, punctiliously keeping hands off all else, so that Burnet in joyous enthusiasm dubbed him the first gentleman in the land.

Beyond Dee he was met by Colonel Nathaniel Gordon with thirty "weill horsit gentilmen," an accession which sent his spirits up many degrees. For Nathaniel Gordon of Ardlogie, puissant knight of the sword, to whom adventure and peril were as the breath of life, was a soldier precisely after Montrose's own heart. With this addition the Royalist General had a body of cavalry numbering exactly forty-four.

"Colonel Gordon," he asked, "can you tell me how many horses are with Burleigh?"

"Five hundred at the smallest reckoning, my lord, and five times as many foot, some three thousand in all."

"And we at the utmost a thousand and a half foot," said Montrose musingly. "And two score and four horse."

"What of that, my lord?" cried Gordon, fearing the odds might be thought too much. "I and my thirty men have slashed at the tails of ten score of them, and I tell your lordship I never saw men exhibit more alacrity in getting out of the way."

"But we are not all Gordons," said Montrose, with a smile. "We hear strange rumours concerning some of that name. Tell me, Ardlogie, is it true they are with Burleigh?"

"May they be confounded in their villainous skins," replied Ardlogie hotly. "Huntly's men are indeed with Burleigh, being drawn to him by honeyed promises or forced by threats. But my Lord George (and I wish he were here now), having still the heart of a man, is up and off to Strathbogie."

"Do you know why?"

"Because the scurvy knaves of Forbeses, Crichtons and other scum and trash turned up their noses at him. They must, forsooth, have their own man. So Craigievar leads them, and Lord George took the road to Strathbogie, nursing his hurt pride. But my Lord Lewis remains. That's a poisonous cur, your Excellency, as ever polluted an honest and deserving cause."

"The young gentleman who decamped to Holland with his father's jewels?"

"The same, my lord."

"Unfilial cub! Has he a command under Burleigh?"

"Ay, that has he; and to the young spark of Satan, your lordship owes it that so many of Huntly's men are out on the wrong side. The cub lies like Belial. Ah, my lord, that whelp hath more than a drop of the old fox's blood in him. Gordon in name; but Campbell in heart."

"I had forgotten," said Montrose quietly, "that he is the son of Argyle's sister. Well, well, I daresay that long before he reaches grey hairs, Colonel Gordon will have furnished him with opportunity to repent."

"Would your lordship have him dead or alive?" asked Gordon, with a queer look.

"Alive," answered Montrose. "I like not the trophy of dead men's heads."

"As you will, my lord, as you will," said Gordon, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Burleigh, too, is for taking alive, and I hear has been encouraging the Fife men with the promise of being your lordship's escort to Edinburgh. What would happen there your lordship may guess."

"I suppose," said Montrose, "that if you and I were the guests of the Convention of Estates, our heads could scarcely be called our own."

"By the mass, and I believe your lordship is right," returned Gordon. "They would relieve us of all trouble concerning our heads with the heartiest goodwill. Well, ere they accomplish their pious designs a merry measure has to be danced."

Getting in touch with the rebel army, Montrose, as

his custom was, sent a commissioner and a drummer with a flag of truce, bearing a letter to the magistrates of Aberdeen requesting peaceable entry to issue his Majesty's proclamation and refresh his troops. If it were granted all would be well. Otherwise he could but ask "that all old persons, women and children do come out and retire themselves, and that *those who stay expect no quarter.*" In the last clause you perceive the hand of Colkitto. He would have sent neither flag of truce nor message. "'Tis somewhat beyond justice, my lord," he remarked, and would have used stronger language had the man he talked to been other than Montrose.

The Provost and bailies desiring time in this dilemma, and having some spare liquor on hand, "Caused the commissioner and drummer drink hardly," thus by a stroke of hospitality putting both out of action. As Montrose's envoys slaked their thirst with burgh ale (the weather being sultry), the perplexed Provost and bailies, with Burleigh, James Viscount Frendraught (who was to make amends by and by), Andrew Lord Fraser, divers barons, the thrice valiant commander of the Fife regiment who had quitted the field of Tippermuir so nimbly, and that stalwart of the Covenant the Reverend Andrew Cant, sat in council on this demand for surrender. Burleigh spoke high brave words. He wanted but a chance to rid the country of that grievous pest, James Graham, a sentiment which made swords clank valorously.

So the commissioner presently got his answer, but before the flag was dismissed the Provost, a fatherly man, called the blue-eyed, girl-faced drummer to him and put into his hand a gold coin as memorial of the occasion. "Keep it for your mother, my mannie," said the Provost kindly, laying a hand on the boy's head. "And pray God you may soon win back to her. She'll be missing you sore, I'm thinking."

The boy lifted his eyes from the treasure to the Provost's face. "She grat when I left her, sir," he said simply. "But this will make her glad." And saluting, went his way.

Poor little nameless drummer-boy ! His waiting mother waited in vain for his kiss. As he went forth, beaming and proud, carrying his flag of truce, an assassin of the Fife regiment sent a bullet through his head, for gain or revenge or both. Such is the way of cowards.

The commissioner returned alone with his message and his news of atrocity. Gleaming with sudden anger, Montrose questioned him closely. The answers left no room for doubt. The drummer had been murdered in cold blood by armed men.

"Is this to be for ever their method ?" cried the Marquis. "They abused my messenger at Weem ; they made him prisoner at Perth ; they kill him at Aberdeen. Enough. Macdonald, let those cowards of Fife be marked out for your utmost vengeance."

"I will see to it," returned Macdonald promptly. "We fight at once ?"

"As quickly as your trumpets can make ready."

Colkitto moved off, but turned sharply.

"No quarter ?" he said.

"I have said no quarter," was the reply. "We have sought peace. Their blood be upon their own heads. Forward, and let the order be for close fighting." Montrose's face had a look not often seen on it, a look of avenging power, magnificent and terrible to behold.

They found the Covenanting army drawn up on well-chosen ground a little outside the town ; cannon in front, wings covered by cavalry, precisely as at Tippermuir. Montrose flashed his eye over the formation, then over the ground, noting every detail of both. Then he made his own modest dispositions. On the right, facing Huntly's misguided son, he placed Nathaniel Gordon with a score of horse ; on the left Sir William Rollock with a score more. They seemed ludicrously inadequate opposed to the five hundred of Burleigh, and would have been so despite their gallantry had he not interspersed them with picked bowmen and musketeers as fleet and active as any cavalry. Near Rollock Montrose himself took his

place with the Ogilvies and such as remained of the Athole and Strathhtay men. To the left of Gordon were Colkitto's Irish, eager as hounds on the leash because their leader had spoken words of promise and comfort to them. They were not long held. O'Cahan, their dashing colonel, brought word that some of the Fife men lay in a garden close by for an ambushade.

"Let me drive the sneaking rogues out, sir," he said.

"Do," replied Colkitto ; and the battle began. Next minute the Fife ambushaders were flying like sheep before the Irish pikes. As a counter stroke, Lord Lewis galloped forward with his horsemen as though meaning to fall on Gordon.

"Rollock, see yon fools," observed Montrose quietly. "Go across and help Gordon to give them the reception they deserve."

Hardly were the words spoken when Rollock and his twenty cavaliers were spurring to the aid of their comrades. Remember the odds were fifteen to one, which might have heartened any attackers were they old wives riding a flock of goats. Before Rollock came up Burleigh's cavalry emptied their pistols and wheeled. Thereupon, at an attempt to turn his left flank, Montrose brought his horsemen across straight from right to left, and Nathaniel Gordon charged, cutting through and trampling the enemy. Yet again, as a counter stroke, Craigievar, with the main body of Burleigh's cavalry, charged the Irish on the right.

"My lads," said Colkitto, his face gleaming with joy, "they are coming even as we hoped. Steady, steady, not a move till they are close." And then, sharp and sudden, as the descending cavalry drew near, "Open ranks, and down with every man of them !"

As on pivots the ranks swung right and left, and the deluded horsemen dashed in to the deadly enfilade. They were no use any more that day.

In the same instant Montrose gave the order for a general advance. "To close quarters with yon cravens," he cried cheerily. "At them with sword and musket-shot. They can never withstand you."

Colkitto, having disposed of the horsemen, turned his attention to the infantry. "See, see!" he shouted, "are the Atholemen to have all the fun of the fair to themselves?" and Ulsterman and Highlander drove in together.

Thus was fought "the cruel and bloody fight and conflict between the Crabstane and the Justice Mylne's" whereof the quaint burgh records give particulars.

In the moment of victory Montrose was arrested by the voice of a man calling lustily. "Ha! comrades, such is the luck of war. Never mind, it won't mend broken things to cry out about them. As for me, sure my Lord Marquis will make me a trooper now that I am no good for the foot."

The General, who had ever a word and a smile for heroism, even in the press and tumult of battle, turned aside to find that the speaker had with his own hand cut away the tegument which held a shattered leg to his body.

"Take that," he said, gravely handing the severed member to a companion. "Take that, and give it decent Christian burial."

"What have we here?" Montrose asked, coming up unperceived from the rear.

"Faith, my lord, a foot man with but half his due of legs," answered the man, saluting.

"My brave friend, how did you get this?" inquired Montrose, kindly bending over the man.

"Faith, by the ill-luck of being in the way of a cannon-ball," was the cheerful reply.

"Did I not hear you wish to be a trooper?" said Montrose. "You are one. Get well of your wound; a good steed awaits you."

"If I had a hundred legs I would give them all for your lordship," cried the man joyously.

"Ah!" returned Montrose. "I might not have a hundred horses to give in exchange. Well, we shall meet again; meantime, methinks a surgeon is your best friend," and thereupon he directed to have the wounded man carried carefully to the rear.

"What did I tell you?" said the man as the Mar-

quis rode forward. "My lord Marquis is as fine a gentleman as God in His providence ever made. There, if you give me your arm I can hop on the leg that's left."

At the town entrance Montrose and his Major-General came together. "Leave them to me, my lord," Colkitto cried, his black face yet blacker with the smoke and dust of battle. "Leave them to me. The Atholmen had Perth, 'tis but fair and right that the Ulstermen should have Aberdeen."

"They have won it," said Montrose with uncommon grimness, and, wheeling his horse, rode back.

"Men," said Colkitto, pressing forward as soon as Montrose had left him, "they are in your hands. Make good the promise given you. Spoil, strip, and spare not." And no second bidding was needed.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRICE OF A HEAD

BURLEIGH, with his brave lieutenants, or such of them as were free, had already turned their horses northward and were spurring for their lives. The foot, alas! having no horses for flight, were caught in the narrow streets, in closes, on stairs, even in cupboards, or dragged screaming and pleading from under beds to pay the price of their leaders' poltroonery. Though outnumbering the pursuers by two to one, they were but a panic-stricken rabble, and made a rabble's resistance. The valiant Fife regiment, which wanted but a chance to make Montrose prisoner, suffered itself to be almost annihilated without blow struck in self-defence. Forsaken by their leaders, destitute of counsel (in Mr. Robertson's memorable words), maddened by fear, the men fell on their knees, clutching the legs of their assailants in supplication, with tears and shrieks for mercy. Alas! alas! for the valour of faint hearts.

"Mercy," grunted the victors as they drove home, "ay, even such mercy as you showed our defenceless drummer-boy."

It was grim work, grimly executed to the wailing of women and the cries and groans of unnerved men. Of those who went down in that gory chaos many were solid townsmen, magistrates, merchants, advocates, Kirk-workers, town officers. The rout complete, Colkitto's men battered in jail doors, dismissed warders, their keys hung ignominiously about their necks, and delivered prisoners. Thus Gordon of Invermarkie, Irving of Lenturk, and other imprisoned cavaliers stepped back to freedom and the pleasures of the chase.

These things done, the Ulstermen took their reward in plunder, none staying them.

Colkitto and his men were not saints on a crusade of mercy. Their methods were somewhat rude and primitive—savage, if you will, with the savagery of the age. They stripped puffy burgesses with scant ceremony, and doubtless had rough enough hands in tearing brocades and jewels from the sleek backs and delicate fingers of ladies, too tempting, perhaps, in their display of riches. Half a regiment of Aberdeen lasses were made willing captives, and carried to the Royalist camp. We shall see by and by how these experienced the tender mercies of the Covenant.

While the plundering went on Montrose was quietly entertaining his captives, Forbes of Craigievar and the rest, in his camp outside the city. Strange irony, absolute victor, he was yet as a paralytic who moves but at the pleasure of others. There is no despot so ruthless as necessity.

"Will aught be left in Aberdeen, my lord?" Forbes ventured to ask.

Montrose looked at him a moment in silence, and then, with a grave smile, put a question in turn.

"Has aught of the Greek of Marischal College stuck to you, Craigievar?"

"Some morsel, my lord," replied Craigievar in astonishment. "Mayhap some very small morsel."

"There runs in my head," said Montrose whimsically, "a speech of Ajax. 'Twas after slaying the silly cattle in his madness. I have scarce looked at the thing since I left the college of St. Andrews. Ah! Craigievar, what havoc these times make of the humanities. But great words, like great deeds, abide in the memory. The thing that Ajax would not he had done, and this was his reason: *'Falter alike great oath and steeled resolve, and none shall say of aught this may not be.'*"

"I catch your lordship's meaning," said Craigievar.

"Ay, faith, 'twould need a duller wit than thine to miss it. Once and again, Craigievar, you and I have felt the under side of this rough world graze our faces. But yesterday we stood side by side."

"I am no turncoat, my lord," said Craigievar, greatly daring.

"If you were," returned Montrose without the smallest touch of resentment, "you would still be in excellent company. He is an obstinate fool who holds to his proved error. As touching this matter there is in that same passage we speak of an apposite and not dishonourable sentiment. Let me jog my rusty memory. Ay, here it is. '*I know of late experience taught that him who is my foe I must but hate as one whom I may yet call friend.*' The fates hasten the time," he added ardently.

"Amen," said Craigievar. "Your lordship were welcome and thrice welcome back."

"What," cried Montrose, with a sudden animation. "Preaching sedition in the king's camp. Craigievar, have you no consideration for your head? Nay, nay, man, do not look so grave. I disdain the practice of Argyle. As for the matter you touch on, let the mighty Ajax once more answer for me: '*Where my way leads thither will I go.*'"

A moment he looked wistfully, almost sadly, at his old friend, and then, as if turning indifferently to some casual affair of the day, remarked, "My Major-General finds Aberdeen somewhat too much to his taste. But he will return to us presently." That was his way of saying that once in a while the Major-General must have his fling, and that unpaid troops must be permitted to pay themselves in their own way.

All of a sudden there arose a commotion on the outskirts of the camp. Montrose turned sharply, the soldier in him instantly alert.

"Ah!" he cried eagerly, "Ardlogie and his scouts, and I profess with the mien of business."

Leaving his men, Ardlogie at once rode up to the General, his horse foaming, his face keen and hard.

"News, Ardlogie?" asked Montrose.

"News, indeed, my lord," replied Ardlogie, throwing himself from his panting horse. "If this bastard time is not full of villainy, call me a doting liar. What thinks your lordship?"

"Nay, I know not what to think save that Colonel Gordon tarries in getting to the point."

"Why, then, my lord, I had liefer run against a score of pike points than this one point about which I tarry. My lord, you shall read for yourself." With that he drew a scroll from his long boot, which he unfolded and presented to Montrose. The Marquis read carefully, calmly, and with a smile.

"A high value, Ardlogie," he remarked quietly. "I would not myself have the face to name half the figure. Craigievar, this interesting document may concern you. For it informs all and sundry that he will be doing the State, which being interpreted means the Covenant, a service who presents me dead or alive to Argyle. Have at it, Craigievar, have at it. The reward is worth winning. My modesty thinks it overmuch; £20,000 Scots. The Covenant grows lavish."

"My lord," returned Craigievar, flushing scarlet, "my name is not Judas."

"It might be a name common enough among your friends," said Ardlogie, with a flashing look. "You have credit of them, sir; you have credit of them."

"Let every herring hang by its own head," put in the Marquis. "A pretty pickle for us all if we were to be held accountable for the conduct of our friends."

"Thank you, my lord," said Craigievar, bowing proudly.

"In battle," observed Montrose, "I would e'en give Craigievar's sword a respectful distance. But Craigievar would not sell so worthless a thing as Montrose's head. Where got you this, Gordon?"

"Why," answered Gordon with alacrity, "I and my men met two score horsemen on the road towards Dee, where we little expected such a pleasure. They were then on their way to nail the proclamation your lordship now holds on the nearest kirk door, and 'tis ordained, as I learned, that your Excellency's head is to be advertised in all pulpits on Sabbath first. Look out for hot ears on that day, my lord."

"If they remain my own so long," laughed Mon-

trose. "But you have not told us, Gordon, how you came into possession of the thing."

"Faith, by the simple and natural trick of taking it," was the reply. "I saw it thrust between the buttons of a rogue's doublet, and thinking it might have a moment's interest for your lordship, why there it is."

"And the horsemen," said Montrose. "What of them?"

"Part of them we carved then and there to make a feast for the corbie crows," Gordon answered lightly. "But part got off, having the villainous trick of spurring their horses when their back is to the foe. For that I am sorry, my lord."

"You are wounded, Ardlogie," said Montrose in some concern, spying blood. "Why made you no mention of it?"

"'Tis nothing, 'tis nothing," Ardlogie returned carelessly. "While I kept three knaves in front, a fourth must needs steal in by the left and touch me on the arm. In return for that courtesy I put him for ever beyond the need of a bonnet. As for the wound, 'tis but a trifle. There's more news, my lord. Argyle is on the Dee with a great army."

Montrose's face instantly became keen and grave. "Craigievar," he said, turning to his prisoner, "will you be pleased to retire while I attend to some needful business?" And when Forbes was out of earshot: "Ardlogie, this is news indeed. How know you that Argyle is so near?"

"I saw him, my lord."

"Saw him!" echoed Montrose in astonishment.

"Saw him," repeated Gordon. "If I had a word of counsel for the patron saint of the Covenant it would be to look to his scouting. I was well-nigh in the midst of his camp."

"Your head will one day pay for your temerity, Ardlogie," remarked Montrose. "Did your men go forward with you?"

"Nay, my lord, as your lordship could ill spare so many of us, men and horses, and as I could not

hope to repeat the feat of Jonathan when he made the Philistines run by routing at them from the top of a rock, I went forward alone."

"And you in command," said Montrose sternly. "Gordon, what punishment does he merit who wantonly imperils the life of one of his Majesty's officers?"

"The least would be the gibbet," returned Gordon promptly. "And faith, my lord, 'twere a good example to mete out justice. As to the business in hand, with the aid of some rocks, a wheen scraggy bushes, and an ancient trick of gliding like the arch-enemy in Eden, I was able to look down at my ease on Argyle's army. Eye could not wish a fairer show. At my lord's tent the banner we wot of flaunted on the wind. A brave man that, my lord, when it comes to the spreading of banners. Other tents had scarce a less gallant look; and there was the gleam of burnished weapons—pike, sword, musket, cannon, horse-trappings and all, in the most beautiful array. If arms alone could win battles the Earl of Argyle were invincible. And as I looked my heart rose in me. If your Excellency cares to know my wish and prayer were this, 'Would to God Montrose were here with five hundred good men to follow as he led.' My lord, my lord, I vow to you 'twas a most tempting sight."

"Tempting to ruin, Ardlogie."

"Nay, as I live, with five hundred men of Mar and Athole at our backs, you and I, my lord, would have gone through that host as the sickle goes through the ripe barley."

"You think so, Ardlogie?"

"Nay, an' I wish I were half as sure of salvation. But I remembered that most of the Atholemen are turned cattle-drovers, and that Colkitto is stripping old wives in Aberdeen."

He spoke bitterly as one who reflects on a lost opportunity. Montrose made no comment, but his gathered brows showed his thoughts were not unlike Ardlogie's.

"You tell me," he said presently, "you looked at your ease on Argyle's army. What made you of the numbers?"

"Two thousand five hundred foot on the least computation," replied Gordon. "And a thousand and a half horse. And I tell you they were so heaped and slothful they appeared just placed for the slaughter."

"Lothian is with him," said Montrose, with tight lips. "Lothian is with him. Gordon, is there any wind left in your horse?"

"There is a gallop in him yet, my lord," answered Ardlogie, stroking his steed's neck.

"Then ride with all your speed into the town, find Macdonald, and tell him I request his presence here immediately. But let him not come without his men. There's not a minute to be lost. If you find him somewhat in his cups, keep beyond reach of his sword, for, indeed, he discriminates too roughly between friend and foe; only see that he comes. Say nothing but that we look for immediate fighting and more plunder. He must not sit drinking the red wine in Aberdeen. I might risk my own poor head, but the king's army is precious. Now, Gordon, as you love me, ride."

With a vault Gordon was in the saddle. "My life for your lordship's command," he said, saluting, and rode off, his spurred heels hard at his charger's sides.

"If the tavern-fool dallies," he said to himself, his teeth set, "then—well, we'll see what will betide."

Montrose watched the diminishing figure thoughtfully.

"On, my sweet pard," he murmured, "had I but a score of thy kind the king's crown were safe on his head to-morrow." Turning next moment he faced Inchbrakie and Ogilvie. "Gentlemen," he said pleasantly, "I have great news for you. Argyle and Lothian are together, and mean us the honour of a visit. Let us be ready to give them a fit reception."

CHAPTER XIII

“MY LORD” COLKITTO

As Montrose suspected, Colkitto was carousing loudly in an Aberdeen tavern. When word was brought to him that Ardlogie was without, desiring a word with him, he swore vehemently at the insolence of the message. Montrose had too many of these interloping captains about him. They must have a lesson.

“Say the King’s Major-General is here,” he cried, garnishing the statement in a manner which evoked a roar of approval. “If Ardlogie or another desires speech with me let him come and not send. ’Tis his duty to a superior officer.”

It was well that Gordon thought more of the cause than of his own feelings, or blood would have been spilled over the insult. At Colkitto’s message he dismounted without a word, threw his rein to an open-mouthed watcher, and strode in, a suppressed anger in the clank of his sword. Macdonald, enthroned in state at the expense of the Covenant, was surrounded by sycophants and guards whose duty was the making of ribald jests, drinking to the potentate, and taking jealous care that no unfit or improper person should approach his greatness. Most of them being flushed with wine jostled Gordon as he went, some even clattering their weapons with a show of offence. The Major-General was seated at the head of a long deal table, a stoup of liquor before him, and a wench on either hand. He lay back like a monarch taking his ease, his black head and half his hairy chest bare, his legs stretched to their utmost. He eyed Ardlogie with

that peculiar truculency which made him a terror alike to friend and to foe.

“Well,” he said, throwing a world of ferocity into the word, “Well?” And then suddenly and fiercely before there could be any reply—“I represent the king’s Majesty here, and look you well, I will have the king’s Majesty respected. Unbonnet, sir!”

Ardlogie drew himself a little more stiffly and saluted.

“Unbonnet, I say,” roared Macdonald, adding the purple of rage to the redness of wine. As he spoke he sat forward, looking as though he would spring at his visitor. There came a swift flush to Gordon’s cheek, swarthy as Macdonald’s own. But with a mighty effort he seemed to control the wild surge within.

“I uncover to the king’s Majesty,” he said, suiting the action to the word. Macdonald fell back in his great chair with a growl.

“Now,” says he, “we’ll hear your business.”

With a tight rein on his feelings Gordon delivered his message, Colkitto watching him like a weasel from under scowling brows. “Umph,” was the reply. “I will consult my men. This is their little festival. Perth to the Atholemen; Aberdeen to the lads of Antrim. They are not sure they have just had their dues as yet.”

“Argyle is on the Dee,” said Ardlogie.

Macdonald laughed contemptuously. “What old wife’s tale have we here?” he cried. “Argyle on the Dee, and out of breath in his haste to get at the king’s troops. Heh, heh. Clavers, Ardlogie, old wives’ clavers.”

“Argyle is on the Dee,” repeated Gordon, with an immovable face, “and Lothian is with him. You may be concerned to hear they have near three thousand foot and half as many horse.”

Colkitto slowly drew himself up erect in his seat, his eyes hard on Gordon’s face. “Ay,” he said, as if considering the statement. “Argyle and Lothian together with near three thousand foot and half as many horse. Who discovered this?”

“By chance that honour fell to me,” replied Gordon.

Macdonald snorted. "Dreaming," he rasped out; "or it may be drinking."

"As much dreaming as I am now when I hear the king's Major-General misdoubt the word of the Marquis of Montrose in the reek of a change-house," returned Gordon. He had to allow himself that little thrust to obviate a worse. Colkitto leaned forward again, his face gleaming darkly. The onlookers held their breath.

"I was not asking your opinion of the king's Major-General," he rejoined in a kind of low growl. "And the man who says that Alastair Macdonald has ever come a hair's breadth short of duty is a liar, mark you, whatever blood may run in his veins."

"I have delivered the orders of my lord Marquis," said Ardlogie, and turned as if to go.

"Stop," cried Macdonald peremptorily, and instantly a score levelled weapons were about Ardlogie.

"I am about the king's business," he said, wheeling back. "Give your men directions to let me go peaceably."

"Look you, Ardlogie," retorted Macdonald, "there does not breathe a man who can come to Alastair Macdonald and say, 'You are a caitiff knave, drinking, in the reek of a change-house when you ought to be up and fighting for the king.' No man will say that and go without answering for it."

"I speak of things as I find them," rejoined Ardlogie, a light in his eye not to be quenched by any threat.

"Great Cæsar's wife, hear him," roared Colkitto. "Well, like yourself, Ardlogie, I have a great fondness for the truth, and I have now to tell you that if it is the good pleasure of Alastair Macdonald to sit in the reek of a change-house, why then that change-house becomes his castle."

Gordon made a gesture of impatience, the effect on Colkitto being as that of a rude buffet on the face. "And I have this other truth to tell, too," he thundered, "that in the reek of this same change-house, which the virtuous Ardlogie finds so little to his taste, I meet with more goodwill and hospitality than I ever found by the fireside of all the Gordons out of perdition."

“Will you let me go back to my lord Marquis?” asked Ardlogie quietly.

“I will first take the liberty of inviting you to eat your words,” was the retort. “In the present juncture of affairs I would be loath to draw on a king’s man, but uncivil words——”

“I meant no incivility,” interrupted Gordon, who had tact as well as courage. “If an apology will make that plain I tender it.” And he bowed profoundly to Macdonald. Colkitto stared a moment, as if taken aback. Then as by magic the thunder-cloud passed from his brow.

“Why, and this is handsome, Ardlogie,” he cried, as though pride and honour soothed by submission were ready to make the best of it. “Ardlogie,” he pursued, “these rogues of the Covenant are judges of wine. Hey,” he cried to the tavern-server who was dealing out his master’s liquor, “a cup for Colonel Gordon. By my honour you shall drink, Ardlogie. This has been a hot and thirsty business. You shall drink to the king’s health and success. Has that lazy knave gone to sleep? Jog him in the rear with a skene dhu, some of you.”

“Here, sir, here,” called the man, who was entering and heard the words.

“Well for you, my man, it is here,” grunted Colkitto. “Have you much on hand yet?”

“The casks are well-nigh empty, my lord,” replied the man in great trepidation.

“My lord,” repeated Colkitto, heaving with merri-ment. “It’s climbing in the world we are. My lord, indeed. You scheming varlet, take that,” and he flung the astonished man a handful of silver. “The casks are well-nigh empty, eh? Knock the bungs out and let them run. Look you, as sure as you’re a man of discernment I wouldn’t have it on my conscience to put temptation in the way of the pretty men of the Covenant. Now, Ardlogie, drink.”

Gordon seized the cup eagerly. “To the king and all the king’s officers,” he cried, lifting it high above his head.

“Done like a jolly cavalier,” commented Macdonald. “Never again speak ill of Covenanting liquor. Psalm-singing and good drink go together. Ha, the sly knaves, the sly knaves,” and he heaved and gurgled.

“My Lord Marquis also sends word that he hopes for immediate fighting and more plunder,” said Ardlogie.

“Call my colonel,” cried Macdonald, leaping to his feet. “This is very pretty and proper news. O’Cahan, my gay cock, mount your fighting spurs and let our trumpets sound the assembly at once. What think you? Argyle has forgotten himself and is on the Dee ready for the sacrifice.”

He shook himself like Samson roused from sleep, and like Samson he veritably looked, his thick black poll in tousy disorder, his great chest thrown out as with very buoyancy of delight.

“Ride back, Ardlogie,” he said, “with the Major-General’s duty and inform my lord Marquis that the Irish brigade marches forthwith conformably to his orders. But before you go another stoup of liquor to warm the cockles of the heart.”

The blaring of the trumpets brought an instant scurrying of bleary, frowsy men in the streets. It was wonderful with what celerity they obeyed; but in truth the drunkest of them was sober enough to remember that when Colkitto called it were the hazard of a man’s life to loiter or disobey. For this man, so lax, so indulgent, apparently so regardless of discipline in hours of ease, made it a rule never to give an order twice. He returned to camp promptly, according to promise, his pipers playing bravely, his men laden with Covenanter’s goods and accompanied by a bevy of lasses, the pick of their kind in Aberdeen.

Ardlogie had faithfully reported the conversation in the tavern, which Montrose, knowing his man, heard without the least surprise.

“A queer fish and a kittle,” he remarked. “Well, we will give him a taste of the golden rule.”

Orders were therefore sent to the approaching Colkitto that his trumpets were to salute the Royal

Standard. They did it with rousing loyalty, Colkitto never suspecting the reason. "Another of Montrose's whimsies," he said to O'Cahan privately. "They please him and do no one else any harm."

Montrose's first remark was of the women. "Why, Macdonald," he said, smiling to hide his dismay at this addition to the impedimenta, "are you copying Cæsar that that you mix the women and the baggage, or have you been playing the parson in Aberdeen that so many wives come forth with you?"

A humorous light overspread Colkitto's face. "My lord," he answered, with a grin, "these unlucky wenches being forsaken by their natural guardians have thrown themselves on our protection."

"Ah, the women, the women," rejoined Montrose. "Was there ever trouble but they were in it somewhere? Well," he proceeded, "your good friend, the Earl of Argyle, keeps pressing his attentions like a persistent suitor. Methinks he means business this time. Lothian has given him fresh heart and force."

"And we are as we were," said Colkitto, casting his eye over the camp. "I spy none of Huntly's men, my lord."

"'Tis hard to spy what there is not to see," returned Montrose. "While you were in Aberdeen I sent letters to Strathbogie, but the Marquis is not here yet."

"'Tis in my mind, my lord," said Colkitto meaningly, "that if he does not visit us it were well that we visit him. Gentlemen of his kidney need rousing; they need rousing, my lord."

"We will give him yet a little grace," returned Montrose. "Rollock is now on his way with despatches to the king telling him all. Mayhap his Majesty will himself expedite Huntly's tardiness. Meantime there is other business on hand."

"We fight?" asked Colkitto.

"They have four thousand men," replied Montrose slowly, "of whom more than a thousand are cavalry. Examine our force and tell me if you think we can meet them."

It was the quickest and easiest way of proving the

impossibility of giving battle. Whatever Colkitto may have been in an Aberdeen tavern he was all soldier now as he went critically through the tiny army. His own men glutted, heavy with wine and still lugging their spoil, were in no condition for hard fighting. The Highlanders were but a remnant, the cavalry but fifty against fifteen hundred.

"My lord," was the Major-General's retort, "in open or sustained battle four thousand men with aught of manhood in them would not leave one of us alive. And if Argyle desired to run away, the shame of Lothian looking on would prevent him."

"Precisely my own judgment," said Montrose. "Have you any suggestion to make?"

"It is in my mind," answered Colkitto with a queer look, "that the fox is a very wise and cunning beast, and this is his plan, to put wit against strength. Any base loon of a shepherd man could knock him on the head and have him torn by common curs, but master fox gets his hen and his goose for all that."

"A game of hit and vanish?" asked Montrose.

"'Twas the device I was forced to at many points of my life," returned Colkitto. "Meantime, why should we not visit the country of our leal and brave friend Huntly? I wouldn't wonder if your Excellency knows a trick that would convince him of the folly of playing hide-and-seek when the king's enemies are about."

"It were a trick well worth trying," Montrose owned. "What is its name, Macdonald?"

"Faith, my lord, the blunt call it harrying," was the answer. "For myself I call it by the prettier name of persuasion. A prog in the hindmost parts is whiles a very fine homily."

"God wot we have enemies enough," put in Airlie. "If it be possible, let us refrain from turning Huntly's hand against us."

"If I'm not blind and doited it is against us now," said Macdonald warmly.

"Not actively," rejoined Airlie. "I say not actively. Forget not, Macdonald, that Huntly's good word were

worth a thousand swords to us. The Gordons are not cowards, for all the skulking of their chief. I am heartily with your lordship. Let us woo and not waste if wooing may mean winning.”

Wooing it was in spite of Colkitto’s growling protest that the fractious should have something tarter than candy to suck. Selecting Ardlogie, Donald Farquharson, “the pride of Braemar,” and one or two more who knew the country, for bodyguard, Montrose pushed on from Kintore to Strathbogie, leaving his Major-General to follow with the army. His purpose was to seek out Huntly for himself, make whatever apologies or submissions the chief of the Gordons might impose if only that jealous backslider would join the king’s standard. But the bird flew at his approach. Neither in Strathbogie nor at Bog of Gicht was sight of Huntly to be obtained, and clansmen were forbidden on the most dread penalties to give information. For a moment even Montrose lost his serenity.

“And this,” he cried in hot vexation, “when one good blow would give us the victory.”

“Would your lordship have him brought in?” asked Ardlogie, with a shrewd look.

“Art in the humour for a little coursing?” returned Montrose. “What hawk or hound would suffice for such quarry? Foxes and fugitives have close hiding-places.”

“Mayhap it might fall out we could find the hiding-place,” said Ardlogie grimly.

“And get a dirk in your vitals for reward,” observed Montrose. “No, no, Ardlogie, we have still some use both for your arm and your head.”

“My very flesh burns for shame,” cried Ardlogie. “If we but laid hands on our noble chief, methinks we could find means for his conversion. The man, my lord, is consumed with envy.”

Montrose sighed heavily. “Ah, Ardlogie,” he said, “some stars would fain have all the sky to themselves, and in their great ambition would snuff out the very sun himself. Think you he is smitten with the Argyle madness and would grasp at the crown?”

"When the vapours of mortified pride work in the brain 'tis hard to guess what fantasies they breed," replied Ardlogie. "But Huntly is indeed mad if he be glamour'd by the ambition you name. I cannot believe that the Argyle poison could so affect his blood."

"Then think you if I were to yield place to him he would join us?" said Montrose. He spoke with a kind of desperate anxiety, his tone even more than his words indicating his terrible eagerness to win the Gordon clan while yet there was time.

"So fast, my lord," was the reply, "that the swiftest horse could not match his eagerness."

"Then go, Ardlogie," cried Montrose. "Seek him out and bring him hither."

"For what, my lord?"

"For what his soul desireth. Say that the king's commission is vested in me but till the arrival of the Marquis of Huntly. I will myself set matters right with his Majesty. Say, too, that as he loves loyalty and honour, to make haste. Tell him besides we need but a thousand swords to bring the King's Majesty in glory to Gordon Castle. You have a nimble mind, Ardlogie, use what argument your wit may devise or occasion need. And now as you love the king and me, make speed."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Ardlogie, a strange look overspreading his face. Montrose's eyes flashed.

"What is this?" he demanded sternly. "Can it be Ardlogie that speaks?"

"My lord," responded Ardlogie, bowing respectfully, "give me leave to say a word. My duty to the king and your lordship, but I cannot practise treason."

"Treason?" cried Montrose. "Treason? Is there general madness about? Take care, Ardlogie, it may be my duty to make an example of him who talks thus in the hour of need. I say to you go immediately, find Huntly and bring him to me."

Ardlogie stood silent with bowed head.

"Why, sirrah," Montrose went on, his voice ringing, "what disobedience is this? Huntly then is not the

only man who makes defect when the king's cause is urgent.”

“If your lordship finds me disobedient, let me forthwith have the reward of disobedience,” was the humble response. “I count my life well given if it be forfeit by your lordship's command. Give me leave to say this: if it be your lordship's wish to have Huntly brought to you in way and for the purpose which would be fitting, then he shall be brought if it lie in Gordon of Ardlogie to do it; but if he be invited to lead the king's troops, then I say again, ‘God forbid.’ Ay, though not a Gordon sword should ever again strike for his Majesty.”

Montrose turned with a quick look of appeal to Farquharson. “Donald,” says he, “can I depend on you?”

“To my utmost breath and last drop of blood,” Farquharson replied instantly.

“Then find Huntly and give him my message.”

But at that Farquharson too was silent. Montrose looked from one to the other like one grievously hurt in the house of his friends. “Gentlemen,” he said, “it seems the king's General has no longer any power of authority. Perhaps I might expect the first hint of that to come from others, but the lesson is all the better taught as it is. I know not well in what language to make my acknowledgment.”

“I crave your Excellency's permission for one word,” said Farquharson, with a piteous look. “When it is said, do what you will with me.” And then, all of a sudden, like the sun breaking through clouds, flashed out the spirit which made Montrose irresistible.

“No, Donald,” he replied, his voice quivering. “I will do no such thing. What need is there to speak? Do I not know Donald Farquharson and Nathaniel Gordon? 'Twas my error, the fantasy of an overheated brain. Dear friends, forgive me. I love your most loyal disobedience. 'Twas bravely done. Yet I profess to you I would give my right hand to have the Gordons with us. Think, Ardlogie, think, Farquharson, that Huntly is at this moment, as I believe, arbiter of the king's fate and refuses his aid.”

"We want no caitiffs and cravens," returned Ardlogie. "There are still men to die for the king and your lordship."

"Ay, that there are," added Farquharson ardently. "Men who will count it glorious to die so."

"Friends," said Montrose, gazing at them mistily, "dear friends, I thank you for that word. And now, since we are unwelcome guest in this Gordon land, let us get back."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LOOMING PORTENT

IN Strathdon he met his advancing, or rather his retreating, troops.

"It seems," he told Colkitto, with his customary serenity, "that our friend Huntly is not yet ready. We must bide a bit."

"My lord," said Colkitto, bluntly, "'tis in my mind the Day of Judgment will find Geordie Gordon still unready in this business."

"A somewhat long tax on patience," quoth Montrose genially. "Ardlogie, here, was for expediting matters by bringing him in like a trapped eagle."

"Ardlogie," remarked Colkitto, with a sniff, "is not without notions of wisdom."

"Only we bethought ourselves," Montrose went on to explain, "of the proverb anent leading a horse to the water and failing to make him drink."

"Doubtless a good enough proverb," returned Colkitto, in some disdain. "Yet one that might mislead a dull man. If it is of any value, my mind on the matter is this, my lord, that if the Marquis of Huntly adorned one of his own oaks in the manner I need not name, it would be a mighty encouragement to the sneaks and laggards of his clan. Your lordship is too much inclined to mercy, which, like bad physic, tends to worsen the disease it is meant to cure."

"So the Covenant once thought when I failed to finish off the Amalekites," responded Montrose whimsically. "Well, well, note how the fickle wind veers. We are all Amalekites now. Any news of our other friend, the Earl of Argyle?"

"He follows respectfully, according to his wont," replied Colkitto. "Not too hotly, my lord, not too hotly, lest he might be accused of putting us to inconvenience. His itchy scratch-the-post rogues glean where they reaped in Aberdeen; and Caliph Archibald, I hear, lodges in state at Drum, whence he issues decrees for a realm. In good sooth we shall soon have more kings in this Britain of ours than can very well be provided with subjects. But I guess 'tis more cackle than capon, as the fox said when he laid hold of the crowing cock. Old Leven having bowels of compassion has sent his own physician, my Lord Callander, to protect the health of Scotland."

Montrose's expression all at once became keen and sharp, but it was with well-feigned indifference he remarked, "I had forgotten old Leven. Methought he was yet busy with the scraps of Gustavus. How he used to plague the camp with tales of the good Adolphus. But our admiring ass had not even wit enough to steal a morsel of the lion's skin to cover himself withal. He has got over the fright of Marston Moor, then. Had Cromwell been of his stuff that day Rupert could well have spared the thousand horse he promised us. Look out for Cromwell, Macdonald, he waxeth in the sky like a thunder-cloud."

"A crop-headed Puritan," said Macdonald contemptuously, "with a villainous trick of psalm-singing."

"He hath yet a more villainous trick than that of psalm-singing," returned Montrose smilingly.

"What is that, my lord?"

"In truth, one I would fain see go out of fashion. The trick of putting the king's troops to shame and confusion. This Cromwell is a rude, forth-right man of most vaulting ambition, a stout fighter, too, with a head for devising; in short, a soldier from boot-heel to helmet-spike. If we look not he will usurp what others aim at. When I writ my little thing on Sovereignty some three years past, I foreboded his coming. Well, war is a kittle game at the best."

"Ay, truly," agreed Macdonald. "A sudden blast from the hills may cool his porridge for him unexpectedly."

“So Callander is come to give the State some physic,” said Montrose thoughtfully. “Jamie Livingstone, with all the blushing honours of Bohemia, Germany, Holland, and Sweden, thick upon him. We must e’en dust James’s jacket and pack him back to Leven again.”

“’Tis some time since we visited our friends in the west,” he added. “Macdonald, you know the secret paths; take us to them.”

CHAPTER XV

TWO AT A GAME

IN that gay-coloured stirring time, Scottish castles, and English as well, saw guests come and go with exhilarating and dramatic suddenness. No sooner was Montrose well out of Strathbogie than Argyle was in it, ravishing and burning with a vengeful pent-up fury. The veracious chronicler of his feats remarks quaintly that "Corn-field lands, out-sicht, in-sicht, horse, nolt, sheep, and all other goods they plunderit quhilk they could get"; and that when at last the thing was done "there was not left four house-holderis dwelling thair of the name of Gordoun." The "Cornis and bestiall" of Strathnaven, Auchendown and other Gordon territories were similarly despoiled. And all the while he who could have prevented it skulked in hiding like one in arrant fear of his life. Yet Huntly was no coward. Nothing indeed ailed him but the fell complaint of jealousy. Better apparently that Argyle should ravish than that Montrose should be the king's right-hand man. So are great causes lost.

In military exploits which chimed with his humour and were safe, Archibald Campbell disdained half-measures. While there was a roof or an ear of corn to be destroyed on the Huntly lands he stayed not his hand. The devastator himself rode to and fro between Strathbogie and Bog of Gicht, tasting the sweetness of vengeance as presented in blazing homes, empty byres and blackened fields. Never was he more deliciously in his element, except it might be in the holy intrigue of Kirk and State. Then ambition being spiced with revenge, played a doubly gratifying game. Such a game it played now. At each of the Gordon castles

in turn Argyle held court, taking obeisance like a throned monarch, receiving reports, issuing decrees, comporting himself in all things as a despot whose will is law.

It was on the third day after his arrival at Bog of Gicht when the country was well plundered, and he was in Huntly's private cabinet writing an account of his glorious success to the Committee of Estates in Edinburgh, that James Stewart of Ardvoirlich was unexpectedly announced. Argyle looked up in some displeasure at the interruption.

"Admit him," he said curtly. His pen was still in his hand as Ardvoirich entered; but immediately and mechanically he laid it aside.

"Well, James," was his greeting. "News of importance that you come so urgently? Goes the harrying to your satisfaction?"

"The harrying, my lord, goes as bonnily as the lowe of an oak log on a winter's night when the storm whistles down the glen," replied Ardvoirlich, with great unction. "I profess it would do your lordship's heart good to see the red fire and the reek and the running fugitives. My lord, there will be fat beef barrels in Lorne for this glorious expedition."

"'Tis well, excellently well," responded Argyle. "Look you, James, I would not that so much as a gable-end were left as shelter from the blast; nay, I would not have one stone left standing upon another. I am of my Lord Strafford's mind in one thing. It is thorough that does it. Let the country be made as bare as a Lochaber man's shank. Tut, example is ever better than precept. Let them have it. Came you upon any of them in your late rides, James?"

"Here and there a skulker, my lord, like a fox among the whins, whom we treated according to his deserts. As touching prisoners——"

"I want no prisoners," interrupted Argyle sharply. "You know my mind there, James. When a prisoner is taken I do not ask too curiously what becomes of him. You understand? But you have something to tell me," he broke off, noting the light in the other man's face.

"Your lordship is a wizard at the guessing," replied Ardvoirlich obsequiously.

"Ah, James!" Argyle sighed with a great air of weariness. "We men of State must sniff the coming wind before it blows, and forecast the colour of to-morrow's sky. 'Tis a duty not required of the hind. Blessed condition! to be devoid of care, to sleep o' nights without thought of what rebel brains may be scheming, or rebel hands working outside. I profess to you there are times when I find it in my heart to envy my own shepherds and deer-stalkers. But your news, James?"

"Astonishing news, my lord," answered Ardvoirlich, swelling visibly. "Would your lordship believe it, that after the skirmish of Aberdeen, which he was pleased to call a most notable victory, James Graham sent a messenger to the king."

"Ay," said Argyle, bending forward eagerly. "A messenger to the king. I feared me there was commerce in that quarter. Know you the messenger's name?"

"His name, my lord, is William Rollock, sometimes called Sir William of Duncrab."

"That traitorous rogue," cried Argyle, his face darkening. "He is James Graham's right hand in rebellion. I would give a thousand crowns to have him this minute."

"Then I have the happiness to inform your lordship he awaits your pleasure in the great hall below."

Argyle stared an instant in amazement, then drew his brows together in a frown. "James," says he, with a searching look, "what is the meaning of this? I warn you I am in no mood for trifling."

"Trifling," repeated Ardvoirlich. "Will your lordship be pleased to ask William Rollock if he thinks it trifling to be brought here bound and guarded? My lord, you can have immediate proof of my words."

"James," said Argyle in a changed tone, "I spoke hastily. These are troublous times when a man can scarce be sure of anything."

"When gave I cause for doubt, my lord?" asked Ardvoirlich, with an injured air. "Have I not seen

my lands laid waste and risked my life and my honour from very love for your lordship?"

"True, James, true," responded Argyle, with a mollifying smile. "My good friend, think no more of it. Tut, where was the bridle on my tongue? Most joyously will I receive the proof you speak of. But first tell me who took the man and the manner of his taking."

"As to the first," answered Ardvoirlich, his face once more shining in gratification, "I made that small affair mine own. Touching the second, the knave affected the guise of a beggar, in which he whined so aptly as to the manner born that some of my men threw him alms in pity. He would have avoided me, but I spied the rogue and made him uncover. 'How does your worship?' says he, with a snivel, putting his cloak to his face as if to wipe away a tear. At the first look, my lord, I discerned his knavery."

"What eyes thou hast, James," murmured Argyle, as though lost in admiration.

"Come hither," says I, and made him turn himself about. "So, William of Duncrab, we have met again. I give you fair greeting, though you seem to have fallen on evil times since we were together at that little tulzie of Tippermuir."

"James, I profess this is fit for the play-house," chuckled Argyle. "What said he?"

"He would have denied the very blood in his veins," answered Ardvoirlich, with a hoarse laugh. "'What?' says I. 'Not know the man who challenged me to drink that night at Collace? It gives me mighty pleasure to meet you again. Come with me, William.' And without more ado, my lord, I ordered my men to take him."

"Not for mere frolic were you and he comrades, James," observed Argyle. "A beggar, you tell me. We will in very truth make him what he affects to be, ay, and add something for goodwill. So William Rollock of Duncrab has been visiting the king at Oxford, as the emissary of James Graham. Rebellion makes strange ambassadors. And now the great man comes

to Strathbogie expecting to find his patron and master. As I live he shall not want hospitality. James, this is good service, most excellent service, not so high as the little ploy with Kilpont ; but worthy, most worthy. Bring hither your prisoner."

The captive was brought under guards, Ardvoirlich strutting in advance, with a mighty air of consequence. "You may go," said Argyle curtly, nodding to the guards, and then he looked at his prisoner from head to foot, slowly, deliberately, with a keen, malicious relish.

It would be almost impossible for anything in human form to bear a more sinister aspect than Gillespie Gruamach then wore. At best the man was not noted for prettiness ; but now to the natural evil of his looks was added the malignity of hate and triumph. The squint of the small close-set eyes, the red Judas-hair, sadly disordered, the long, thin, hard face suggested the height or depth of gloating cruelty. He was dressed loosely in black, sword-belt and scarf being for the moment laid aside. He had the look of a great raven sharpening his beak for a feast.

"Sir," says he, with a malign smile, "the honour of this visit is more than I could have looked for. It grieves me to see an old friend at such odds with fortune. Ah ! William, treason does not prosper."

"On the contrary," returned Rollock without flinching, "judging from what I see before me treason prospers exceedingly."

"Sirrah," put in Ardvoirlich roughly, "do you bandy words with the Marquis ?"

"Patience, James, patience," said Argyle, with a leer. "I hear the poor fellow has lately been in high company, and the thing mayhap has taken his head. The fumes will go presently. You have been on an embassy to the king, William. I trust his Majesty is well."

"Thanks be to Heaven, his Majesty is well," replied Rollock shortly. "Yet methinks his health will be better by and by when treason and rebellion are stamped out of the land."

"Solomon was never wiser," cooed Argyle. "It sometimes happens that men speak oracles without knowing it, and as it were by the inadvertency of nature. Bring you any message from his Majesty?"

"None for your lordship," was the prompt reply.

"It grieveth me to be uncivil to an old friend," said Argyle meaningly; "but as the fellow in the play has it, the times are out of joint. One is forced, Duncrab, one is forced. James, have you searched him?"

"Nay, my lord, I brought him as I found him," replied Ardvoirlich, "only taking care that he destroyed nothing and threw nothing away."

"'Tis well," said Argyle, in the same soft, even voice. "Doubtless, the king's message being precious is precious bestowd. I put it to you, Duncrab, as a friend, will you give it up of your own free will? 'Twere best, methinks."

Duncrab's reply was a fierce compression of the lips and a look of defiance.

"No," said Argyle, as if the other had spoken. "Let it be as you please. 'Tis said that Heaven helps them who help themselves. We will prove that proverb. Have the goodness to take off your boots, Duncrab. Tut, tut, I crave pardon in forgetting that your hands are not quite free. Ardvoirlich, call a couple of handy fellows to unboot him. He shall have a pair of boot-jacks all to himself."

The boots were pulled off, so rudely that the ankles were nearly dislocated, but no despatch was found. "Perchance it is in the beggar's wallet," remarked Argyle, watching the proceedings like a roused cat. Next instant the wallet was in shreds. Then piece by piece the clothing, from the ragged blue gown to the raggeder blue bonnet, was ripped asunder, so that not so much as a seam or bit of lining remained intact. Still no despatch.

"Have you swallowed it, Duncrab?" Argyle demanded, glooming suddenly. "I should be loath to have you split like an oyster for the pearl inside. Divulge, man, divulge and end the farce."

"It lies wholly with your lordship to end the farce," returned Rollock unabashed.

"And I know how to do it," said Argyle, with an ugly look. "Believe me, I know how to do it. Only you see I don't like to think you have looked for the last time upon the bonnie bights of Duncrab. I would fain save your neck from that forebodeful itching which makes the whole flesh creep."

"Your lordship knows the sensation," said Rollock quietly.

"Come, come, we waste time," retorted Argyle. "And there is much to be done. Will you surrender the message?"

But Duncrab only drew himself up the more resolutely.

"Still defiant," said Argyle. "It puts us to the disagreeable task of being uncivil. James, are you sure the beggar cast none of his clouts after being taken?"

"Certain, my lord. But mayhap the king's message was delivered to his ear alone, and that his tongue alone can divulge it."

"And you would make the obstinate member speak?" said Argyle.

"Or come out," returned Ardvoirlich.

"In good faith Major Stewart grows drastic," remarked Argyle, with a cackling laugh. "Speak now, or be for ever dumb. Rough medicine, James, rough medicine. 'Tis the practice of pious men in England to crop the ears and slit the tongues of refractories. I would not be so rigorous—unless my hand were forced. Besides, James, I have reason to think your guess is wrong. I know your namesake Charles has a weakness for inditing. Let us have one look more. Does it not appear to you the gaberlunzie has stout boots? Give me one of them."

He took the boot gingerly between finger and thumb, turning it round and round and examining it with the most ardent curiosity. "The other," he said quietly. And taking it, he held the two together for comparison. For a moment he was silent; and it seemed he was

about to throw down the boots in disappointment, when all of a sudden he cried out like one who makes a vital discovery. "Ah," he said. "Ah!" Again he held the boots together, bending over them as a miser over his gold. Of a sudden he lifted his head. "Here," he said quickly to one of the men who had performed the operation of unbooting. "Take your skene and slit this boot open—the sole, you fool, the sole—and see you take out the layers whole."

As the fellow obeyed, Rollock's face became deathly pale; but otherwise he gave no sign of emotion. Argyle was bent forward watching breathlessly.

"There, that will do," he said, when the slicing and tearing had been done to his satisfaction. "Give it back to me."

Seizing the boot he tore the loosened sole asunder, and from between the layers drew forth what seemed to be a very thin scrap of paper. Despite his habitual self-command he was trembling with excitement as he unfolded the missive.

"Ingeniously hid," he panted, glancing at Rollock. "'Tis the Oxford plan, and may be expected to become classic."

He smoothed out the paper with a shaking hand, ran his eye over it and looked at Ardvairlich.

"There is matter here needing attention," he said. "I desire to be alone. James, remove your prisoner. Give the beggar something to eat, but see to it that he is well guarded. The man that lets him go shall answer for it with his own life. Good evening, Sir William," and he bowed mockingly.

CHAPTER XVI

GREEK MEETS GREEK

HE went over the document, first in unwinking haste and then slowly with puckered brows like one picking out hidden meanings in a foreign tongue. Here, indeed, was a providential capture, a veritable message from the king to the arch-rebel James Graham, which policy might turn to account if only—— If! A pretty stile to trip or balk the dictator of a kingdom. Argyle frowned blackly, his concentrated gaze seeming to pierce the crumpled paper. Was it also to be obstinately dumb, or to give only such rays of light as made the darkness the more irritating and baffling?

Like one in a deep rumination he lay back in his chair and stared hard at the ceiling. If you would have a true portrait of a man you must catch him when he is most himself, that is to say, when he is off his guard. In bodily presence Argyle was the very acme of insignificance as he sat in Huntly's great chair, before Huntly's silver candlesticks, staring at the frescoed ceiling. He might be a troubled preacher, a philosopher lost in regret over the world's folly. Certainly there was little of the cloud-compeller in that meagre, red-haired, cross-eyed figure in black,—till you forgot the crouched body in the fascination of the diabolical energy and intelligence of the lean, long, cunning face. My Lord Clarendon opined he wanted nothing but honesty and courage to be a very extraordinary man. Perhaps he was the more extraordinary for want of them. The fox has no defect for lacking the qualities of the lion.

He rose presently and paced the room, a little bent,

wizened man prematurely old, yet with a light in his crafty eyes such as youth never kindled. Long before his crabbed, much-tried father had said to Charles, "Take care, your Majesty; trust him not, or he will wind you a pirn." Charles, as his easy habit was, gave no heed to the warning. Young Lorn was loaded with favours, even to the exclusion of true loyalty, and in due time began according to paternal prophecy to wind the fateful pirn. He was hard at it now—with Charles's arrested despatch lying under his hand.

The poor fool Rollock, with a fool's innocence, entered Strathbogie expecting to be greeted by Montrose, Montrose who was in the plight of having to bury his cannon in the bogs of Rothiemurchus while dodging the Grants and the Frasers. All that argued a most promising confusion. Montrose fled so precipitately his own followers could not find him. Consequently the lamb came unbidden and unexpected to the slaughter. Argyle smiled darkly at the thought.

But this message, which meant so much, was it to lie like a Chaldee inscription undeciphered? By no means. Luckily the key was at hand. Rollock would translate—or kail would be got through the reek. Meanwhile policy was the cue. All at once Argyle rapped peremptorily with his heel on the oak floor, and, obediently as the slave of an Oriental despot, an attendant immediately entered.

"Bid Major Stewart of Ardvoirlich come to me at once with Sir William Rollock," was the order. He was again seated and smiling when Ardvoirlich entered with his prisoner.

"Has our guest had any refection, James?" he asked affably. Ardvoirlich answered there had been little time to eat. "'Tis well," said Argyle blandly. "I am myself in need of refreshment and will relish company. Sir William and I will have our snack together, and as I know you have important business elsewhere, we will not detain you, Ardvoirlich."

So Ardvoirlich was dismissed to his great amazement, without chance of protest or warning, and the attendant again summoned.

"I dine here," Argyle told him, "and Sir William Rollock dines with me. Make haste; bring us whatever may be ready, flesh, fowl, or fish, and a bottle of wine. Let it be good. My Lord Huntly is a judge to whom a king might entrust his vintages," he added to Rollock with a chuckle. "I trust, Duncrab, your appetite is what your best friend could wish it to be."

"My lord," replied Rollock, "my appetite is of twenty-four hours' standing and as keen as a Ben Lomond wind in January."

Argyle beamed. "When a man and his meat fall out then 'tis time for prayers," he remarked genially. "You will pardon me for dispensing with ceremony. In these times hospitality is like one out of favour at Court, somewhat jostled and made little of. But here we are, here we are such as we are," he added almost jovially, as the laden trenchers made their appearance, flanked by several bottles of wine. "Duncrab, I beg of you to have at it. Fall to, fall to, only permit me to give you a toast first. To our next merry meeting. Ah, ha."

There was an extraordinary vivacity in his face and manner. You would have fancied he had shaken off the last jot of care, and thought of nothing in all the world but his guest's entertainment.

"Your lordship is pleased to be humoursome," returned Rollock, who had the gift of taking things as he found them. "And in good truth the winter fire never made chimney drier than my throat is now. I drink your lordship's toast with exceeding great pleasure." He raised his goblet and drained it at a draught.

"Another," cried Argyle in the very tones of a bacchanal. "What think you of Huntly's vintage? When you and I, Duncrab, are in the rough and tumble of the world, in bruilzie and bloodshed, the politic Huntly is attending to his wine-cellars. Heaven reward him. Methinks he has the blessing of two thirsty men."

"Amen," chimed Rollock, drinking again.

"And now," added Argyle with the greatest heartiness and goodwill, "as our west country has it, the hunger to him who doesn't help himself."

For some time Rollock, who had the famishing man's welcome for the trencher, was too busy on his own account to note the slackness of his host. All at once, however, he called out, "The hunger to him who doesn't help himself. Your lordship is chary of the bottle."

"A pesky weakness of the stomach, Duncrab," was the grave response. "For my sins I must needs stint, but you——" And he poured out another goblet for his guest. "I think you will agree Huntly has discernment in these matters," he added, with a crafty sidelong glance at the other. He was gratified to see that the liquor was taking effect. Already Rollock's eye was glowing festively and his tongue was loosened; presently it would be babbling secrets. Rollock, on the other hand, was asking himself whether this was not Argyle, beaming, cordial, thinking only of courtesy and hospitality? Surely his reputation did him wrong. Well, one must judge as one finds. Here was conduct worthy of any cavalier. In truth a spirit of clamorous brotherhood was beginning to swell in Rollock's heart.

"My lord," he cried in a roystering voice, "would you have my opinion on a certain matter? 'Tis this, that the world is a liar, a monstrous black liar. With my own ears I have heard it speak ill of the Marquis of Argyle."

Argyle bent on him a penetrating look which was instantly replaced by a saint-like expression. "You are too generous, Duncrab," he responded meekly.

"Nay, nay, I speak but the truth," insisted Duncrab blatantly. "My own ears have heard the lie. Lord, Lord, but 'tis a wicked false world."

"Ah! Duncrab," said Argyle, still with the martyr air. "I would all men had thy honesty. "My good friend, not all have the generosity to make their tongues speak as their eyes and hearts see."

"I would speak truth in face of the foul fiend himself," declared Rollock loudly. "I say they have slandered your lordship abominably, most abominably."

"What would you have from a serpent but falsity?" inquired Argyle, with a sad, angelic smile.

"By the Mass, but I would hack off that serpent's head, look you," cried Duncrab. "What I say is this, that your lordship is as proper a man as any king, prince, or cavalier among them." Argyle leaned yet further forward, smiling seraphically, and held out his hand; Rollock seized it as if he had been waiting for the opportunity. "If your lordship would but leave the owls and the bats," he said. "Tuts, what has a man like your lordship to do with canting, snivelling knaves who would consign poor cavaliers to eternal torment?"

"We will talk of that anon," returned Argyle radiantly. "Duncrab, it warms the heart to hear the words of a friend. 'Tis a lucky meeting. Friends, and never knowing it, Duncrab; friends while we mistook each other for enemies. Ah, ha."

By this time the remnants of the meat were removed, and the two sat by themselves over Huntly's choicest wine. An autumn chill was in the air, and an oak log blazed and crackled cheerily on the hearth. Drawing his chair nearer, Argyle spread out his thin hands to the flame, his half-averted face shining with satisfaction. So the good Rollock was an evangelist in his cups. Well, well, two could play at that game, and of the twain it might prove that Rollock was not the better player. The Marquis warmed and rubbed his hands thoughtfully. Then rising and turning, he remarked as it were casually, "Tell me, Rollock, how found you his Majesty at Oxford?"

"Most gracious, most kind and flattering," answered Rollock, with alacrity. "His Majesty was pleased to be complimentary. When I had eaten and drunk of the fare from his own table, it was his pleasure to summon me to the presence and talk like a brother, ay, like a very brother. He was mighty curious, my lord, concerning the course of things in Scotland here."

"And you told him, Duncrab?" said Argyle, again spreading his hands to the flame.

"Faith, I remembered Scripture as was fitting," replied Duncrab. "And so I told his Majesty that whiles the wind blew, and whiles the rain fell, and whiles

the storm beat so that an honest man could scarce keep his feet. 'You mean his head, Sir William?' says his Majesty, with a laugh. He hath ever a merry and pleasant way with him. You should have heard the courtiers echo. Those men, my lord, have ever their fiddles tuned to the right note. Oh, 'twas a most rare thing that jest of the king's. 'Yes,' says he. 'You mean his head. In England here our Puritan rulers find godly sport in cropping the ears of adversaries. Mark me, Sir William, they will be chopping off heads next. To begin with an ear is to end with a head. I warn you, Sir William, to look out; this Cromwell and his friends have not my consideration for men's heads,' whereat the courtiers laughed again."

"They are unco' blithe at Oxford," remarked Argyle. "And the king seems merriest of all."

"Nay," returned Rollock, "methought that at the mention of Cromwell his Majesty drew a grave face. And in faith that same Cromwell is a terrible fellow. I saw the man, my lord. These eyes looked into his."

"You saw Cromwell?" said Argyle in amazement.

"Looked on him as plainly and nearly as I look on your lordship now," Rollock responded.

"How contrived you that?" asked Argyle, with an eagerness he could not suppress.

"In truth, by doing the thing I would not, which is to say, by coming slap on a troop of his horse when I fain would have seen them over the ears in a bog. Cromwell, it appears, was riding to the west country, where my Lord Essex was not nimble enough to avoid the meshes of the net; and these scouts of his laid hands on me, the issue being that I trudged ten weary miles at a horse's tail to discuss events with Master Cromwell."

"And what think you of him?" Argyle inquired.

"As rude a boor as ever had an honest man in his power," replied Rollock. "A squat, stout, heavy-footed fellow, with the jowl of a bloodhound and an eye of fire withal. At the first sentence, as it chanced, my speech bewrayed me. I was never ashamed to own the land of my birth, as your lordship may judge."

‘Scotch,’ says he, with a growl. “Your Excellency hath judged aright,” I answered. ‘I am indeed of the kindred of those brave Scots who fight so well for your Excellency’ (may the witches fly away with them). ‘And truly I am in sore straits, for in losing sight of them I have also lost my way in this desolate land.’ ‘Umph,’ says he. ‘A good hand at a tale. Have you searched him, men?’ ‘So closely that not a pin-head could have escaped us,’ they answered him. ‘And found nothing?’ Nothing, your Excellency, but crumbs in his beggar’s wallet.’ They were not as sharp as your lordship, ha, ha! ‘Friend,’ says he, looking very hard at me. He hath an eye like a sword-point for sharpness. ‘I am not overmuch in love with thy looks. I mistrust glib tongues. We are somewhat in haste; choose thee, therefore, whether thou wilt speak the truth quickly and plainly or be dealt with by a firing file of my men as a rogue, a cheat, and a vagabond. I give thee three minutes to make thy choice.’ ‘Less will suffice, your Excellency,’ I told him. ‘I am for the plain, unvarnished truth.’ ‘Out with it then,’ says he, ‘out with it, and remember for thy soul’s sake that as surely as I find fraud in thee thou wilt be dealt with as I say.’

“‘The truth then is, your Excellency,’ I answered him, ‘that you see your humble servant in a very sorry plight, making his way homeward in hope of obtaining that relief in his own land which godly folk deny him in England.’ ‘Was bred a beggar?’ says he shrewdly. ‘Friend, I have a mind to have thee earmarked, so that if we meet again we may know each other. Get thee gone, and let me not see thy face again if thou valuest thy skin.’ ‘Would your Excellency bestow an alms on a poor man?’ I asked him, and methinks I did the trick bonnily. ‘Thou art an impudent varlet,’ says he. ‘Wouldst have me reward thee for lying?’ A shrewd dog, my lord, a shrewd dog. Nevertheless he flung me a piece of silver, telling me again to be gone. And right glad was I to obey, for in truth there is that in his face which gives assurance he speaks not idly nor as a jester.”

Argyle sat down again, as it seemed in a deep muse. "I have not fathomed this man Cromwell," he observed presently.

"A deep well and a dark, my lord, believe me," returned Duncrab.

"Belike, belike," said Argyle, as if dismissing the Puritan from his mind. "And the king, Duncrab, said he aught of old friends in Scotland?"

"Ay, that did he, my lord. His Majesty has a memory. He named your lordship."

"And what said his Majesty touching the meanest of his servants?"

"An odd reference, my lord. A most curious and puzzling reference. He smiled and recalled a word of your lordship's father anent winding a pirn."

Argyle was holding his breath; but outwardly he was calm, almost indifferent. "The king was ever fond of his jest," he said quietly.

"Somehow methought he was not jesting," rejoined Rollock. "But in truth the matter was too dark for me, my lord. Besides, I had not ears enough for half the wonderful things I heard. There was something, I know not what, concerning advice given and not taken. I have heard, my lord, that for all his goodness, his Majesty doth not rival Solomon in wisdom."

Argyle was gazing at him keenly. Did this babbler know or suspect what lay behind that story of the pirn? There seemed nothing but open, simple honesty in Rollock's incontinent tongue, and yet for all his babblement, his friendly bacchic abandon, there were moments when Argyle was doubtful whether the wine had quite overcome discretion? Was the man daring to play a part? One who was himself a play-actor would not tolerate that.

"Ay," he said, his narrow eyes concentrated and glimmering, "his Majesty jested about winding a pirn. You and I, Rollock, have sterner things than jests to engage us. Does the wine turn sour?"

"The wine, my lord, is most sweet and excellent."

"Drink then, to-morrow may bring other fare."

"Let to-morrow be as it will if to-day is good,"

answered Rollock, draining his cup. Argyle thoughtfully refilled it.

"Touching this despatch," he said, as if the thing came casually into his head. "I cast my eye over it while waiting for you here. The writing is crabbed as ever I saw. Canst make it out, Duncrab?"

"I was never the pride of my schoolmaster," replied Rollock. "And under your lordship's hospitality my poor noddle is none of the clearest. Besides, the thing is strange to me. I know no more of it than the old owl in the tree. Yet if your lordship thinks it proper I will try my poor abilities upon it."

"Do," said Argyle, not altogether able to dissemble his eagerness.

Rollock took the document, examining it for a moment with a puckered face, as if he had never seen such a puzzle in his life. "Tough," he said, "tough and crabbed as ever hand of man devised for the puzzling of a poor scholar."

He took up his cup and drank, peering with one red eye over the brim at Argyle. Then he made a movement as though to hold the paper nearer the light. "Why," he cried, staring hard at it, yet contriving to keep an eye on his companion, "I profess I never met before such a babble of nonsense. Had I but known, never would I have run such risks to bring the thing safe from Oxford. Fie, fie, to vex your lordship with such a thing." And with lightning-like agility he leaped forward and thrust the document into the heart of the blazing fire.

With a cry of rage Argyle also sprang forward and snatched at it; but the flame licked and scorched his fingers, and with an oath he dropped the crackling remnants.

CHAPTER XVII

VALOUR IN A STRAIT

HE wheeled half crouching as for a spring, his face livid with the malignancy of fury and disappointment. People said the great schemer had no passion, only a cold, deadly craft. They wronged him. Even Sir William Rollock, a man of some nerve in emergencies, recoiled from the shock of the furious visage. Yet even then Argyle was master of his wrath; he did not blaze incontinently as a weaker man would have done.

"Duncrab," he said, with a vicious hiss, "a smaller thing has cost many a good man his head."

But Rollock, though momentarily taken aback, was equal to the occasion. "As I live," he laughed thickly, like one far gone in drink, "I profess your lordship has taken to jesting."

"They may find it jesting little to their taste who presume on it," retorted Argyle, the flush of anger giving place to a steely gleam yet more dangerous. "If you think to practise brazen tricks on me, Duncrab, I have this to say to you as a friend, think better of it. I were well justified in having the hand which thrust that paper into the flame thrust after it and held in the very midst of the fire till it was a charred stump that could no longer play the fool or the knave."

"The knave, my lord?" returned Rollock, with a face of blank astonishment. "The word is somewhat demeaning to a man of honour."

"And what of the deed?" demanded Argyle. "What of the deed? I give you fair warning that I am not to be trifled with."

Instinctively Rollock's hand sought his side, but the familiar sword was not there.

"Ay," said Argyle, marking the movement, "you would call in your sword to amend the defects of your wit. 'Tis ever the device of fools."

"My lord," replied Rollock, "you take me at a disadvantage."

"Disadvantage," repeated Argyle scornfully. "Disadvantage. Certes, assurance waxes fat. Suppose then you found yourself in your proper character, with sword girt and all the fine cavalier fierceness unhindered, I ween you would challenge the weak Argyle to combat, or perhaps spit him neatly ere he had time to draw. Well, 'tis not Argyle's policy to sully his hands with blood, even when it is the blood of a Rollock of Duncrab; but let me whisper this in your ear—there are men about him whose swords are every whit as ready as Sir William Rollock's, and perchance as sharp."

"Your lordship mistakes me," responded Rollock, perceiving his error.

"I admit that truth," said Argyle. "I did mistake you. But enough of prating. I have much to do, and will give Sir William Rollock a chance to meditate on his deeds of this evening."

He rapped imperatively with his foot, and as before, the attendant came instantly. Aside and in a low voice Argyle gave instructions, and Rollock was dismissed. Then immediately Ardvoirlich was summoned.

"I have sent that gasconading fool away drunk, James," the dictator informed him. "He will sleep heavily like a beast. Yet see that guards are placed, one at his door, one under his window, nay, let there be two for window and door, so that if the need arise one may hit should the other miss. Explain to them a soldier's duty if their prisoner attempt to escape."

"Explicitly, my lord," Ardvoirlich replied with a great show of obedience. "Found you the knave pliant, my lord?"

"As putty, James, as putty," was the answer. "Yet must we ever remember that putty hardens and becomes obstinate. I have further use for Will Rollock. Give

him a bottle of wine for bed-fellow; give him two, give him as many as thy heart inclines thee to. Stint not hospitality. He drinks like the great sperm whale in summer. Yet the rogue has the cavalier's trick of withstanding liquor. 'Tis as hard to make these desperate blades drunk, James, as to make some of our godly friends sober. Keep your sharpest eye on him. I suspect he is not all fool when he seems so. His whine and his drooping jowl deceived Cromwell; see that his impudence prove not too much for James Stewart."

"Deceived Cromwell?" repeated Ardvoirlich. "Has he then been with the Roundheads?"

"He hath a mighty curiosity," replied Argyle, "and the Rollock blood lacks not a spice of daring. But more of that anon. On the homeward journey this emissary of the king and rebel must needs pay his devoirs to Cromwell—for friendship's sake; ay, let us say for friendship's sake; restrain thy mirth, James,—and Cromwell, whose ear is not over credulous, believed the fellow and threw him an alms. When he affects the smooth word with you let him have a rasp of your jagged edge. Honest roughness was ever thy besetting and invaluable virtue, James. And methinks it were well to keep swords out of his way. Desperate men, desperate deeds. I say no more."

"My lord," cried Ardvoirlich, with a great laugh, "though he outdo the serpent in lying yet will he waste his gift upon me if he have not the trick of crawling through keyholes and defying steel and lead like a witch. Your lordship may expect to find him safe and snug at your pleasure to-morrow morning."

"See to it then, James, see to it," said Argyle. "I have further business with him. And now, any tidings of his friends the rebels?"

"Truly the rebels show a marvellous discretion in keeping out of your lordship's way," Ardvoirlich returned, with a smirk.

"Expeditious in flight, James' expeditious in flight," smiled Argyle. "'Tis my particular regret that James Graham will not stand and come to grips. No sooner

do I gall his heel than he is up and off. Has the man the gift of invisibility? Yet are we not without satisfaction. Lothian sends me word that the country by Aberdeen is well and thoroughly wasted. Strathbogie and Bog of Gicht testify to our own zeal. When Prometheus stole fire from heaven he did mankind a most estimable service. Your fire is the true purger of grossness. Hast ever heard of Prometheus, James?"

"No, my lord."

"Heaven bless thee, James, in thine innocence. Thou dost not pack thy noddle with idle fables. Take heart, thou wilt not sleep a whit less soundly nor fight a whit less bravely for knowing naught of the bringer of fire. More in thy way, James, any tidings of James Graham?"

"A shepherd loon just in brings news of him in Badenoch," answered Ardvoirlich.

"Badenoch?" cried Argyle in quick concern. "Think you he means to push west when I am absent? I would not for a hundred thousand crowns that the secret passes to Argyle were discovered. But no, no, 'tis a far cry to Lochow. The good wives of Inverary may spin and gossip at their ease. Even James Graham and his gallow-glasses will scarce pierce through to Lorn."

"No, my lord," said Ardvoirlich, scratching his shaggy head. "But it might run in their evil heads to take a turn by Lochearnside."

"Have no fear on that score, James," rejoined Argyle assuringly. "For every stalk of corn they take from the lands of Ardvoirlich they shall restore three; ay, and for every roof they burn, ten shall blaze in vengeance. But methinks Lochearnside must be profiting handsomely by the stripping of Strathbogie."

"Truly, my lord," responded Ardvoirlich, "the profit is yet rather short of the loss. For myself, I have been plundered most cruelly. That villain Colkitto and his hungry Irish came upon the land like devouring locusts."

"They shall disgorge, James," said Argyle confidently. "Believe me, they shall disgorge. We will crush them,

look you, even as the snail in its shell that is trodden upon. They shall deliver up their stolen gear, ay, and pay good interest to boot. This sweeping of Strathbogie is but the beginning, the small, small beginning that portendeth the great end. You shall be amply revenged, James ; you shall feed fat all your ancient grudges. So shall we all. Hark you, what is that ? ” he broke off abruptly at the noise of a tumult without. In a single stride he was at the window, but the darkness was too much even for eyes sharpened by fear. With a white face he turned back to Ardvoirlich.

“ James, see what this means,” he cried. But before James could obey a wild clamour in the hall and on the stair froze Argyle’s blood at his heart. The next instant a man burst in without ceremony, calling out that the enemy was at hand.

“ Is Montrose himself with them ? ” Argyle asked, in a deathly pallor.

“ Such is the report, my lord,” answered the man. “ But the darkness is so thick and the onset so sudden that we scarce know what is happening. They pounced upon us like beasts of prey out of the night, slashing and killing ere we had time to draw swords or prime musket. I am sent to inform your lordship and take your instructions.”

“ Let me see, let me see,” said Argyle, quaking so that his tongue could scarcely perform its office. “ My sword, my sword,” he called, as though to fortify himself with the touch of steel. His fingers fumbled impotently with the belt. “ Will the cursed thing not buckle ? ” he cried in desperation. “ Ah, there it is. How came this surprise ? I will have the scout-master hanged.”

“ I fear me, my lord, he is beyond hanging,” said the messenger.

“ Killed ? ” asked Argyle.

“ Ay, my lord, and many more with him.”

“ A plague on all rebel villains,” cried Argyle distractedly. “ James Graham shall pay dearly for this. I say his life shall answer for the loss of my brave scout-master. Hark, is not the tumult increasing ? Was not that a scream I heard ? The enemy are

upon us in force. Somebody shall suffer for this. Go, go at once and see to the defences. Let the house be fortified and defended with your lives. Say there is to be no quarter for any rebel, and that the man who flinches will be shot. The Lord direct us in this extremity. Tell my men I will be forth immediately to lead them myself ; it will encourage them. But first I must see to these papers, which are important. Now go, James ; have all barricadoes seen to ; let the ramparts be manned. We must not die like rats in a hole. You see," he ended, with a sickly but characteristic smile, "you see, James, they are not taking a turn by Lochearnside." Had he spoken his mind freely, he would have added, "I devoutly wish they were."

He descended presently, a crawling cold at his vitals, thinking of ways of escape. Argyle was ever a believer in the prudence of keeping a whole skin against the needs of another day. It was all very well to be brave and reckless ; but dead men win no victories, serve no causes, are gratified by no success ; and if the blood-thirsty James Graham got hands on him—his red hair rose at the bare thought.

The great hall was turned into a miniature theatre of war. To his dazed and affrighted mind it seemed that the foe had carried the place by assault and were rioting in slaughter. With unspeakable relief he discovered the men were his own. But what meant the scuffling and swishing of swords ?

"What is this ?" he demanded sternly, feeling his courage come back.

"This knave, my lord, has somehow possessed himself of a sword," some one answered.

"What knave, what knave ?" he asked irritably.

"Why, the prisoner, Sir William Rollock, my lord," was the reply. By the lurid light of the torches in a recess near the door he spied his whilom friend laying about him with extraordinary vigour.

"Finding attention distracted by the noise outside, my lord," said the voice from below, "he plucked up a sword and made to escape, but we held him."

It was as the man said. Hearing the noise and

instantly divining its cause, Rollock had, while his jailers were momentarily off their guard, snatched a sword and made a bolt for liberty. He would have cut his way out but for a block at the door. There he turned aside, set his back to the wall and slashed with so much skill and vigour that with his single arm he kept a crowd of assailants at bay.

"Cut him down," commanded Argyle from above. "Cut him down. On penalty of death let him not escape."

At that one of his men lunged fiercely, meaning to settle the business handsomely before the great man's eyes. But with the celerity of a dancing sunbeam Rollock swerved, made a spring before the other could recover, pinked his man, dodged, struck again, and again dodged; and then, with great swinging strokes like a mower with a scythe, he swept his assailants back.

"He will be off," cried Argyle in a kind of agony. "As sure as I live he will be off."

And even as he spoke, with one fierce leap Rollock gained the open door. Whereupon he did a characteristic thing. For all the confusion, excitement, and peril, he must needs give himself a little personal gratification. Pausing in the doorway, he turned, doffing his beggar's blue bonnet satirically to Argyle.

"I wish your lordship a very good night," says he with a flourish. "And health till our next merry meeting."

"Seize him, seize him," shrieked Argyle. But before a sword-point could reach him he had darted into the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

ARGYLE'S HOSPITALITY

SEVERAL men were immediately on his heels with shouts and a great show of bravery. The others remained, panting, sheepish and ashamed, to learn the pleasure of Argyle. For a minute he stood unconscious of their presence, hearkening to the clamour of voices and the sound of racing footsteps outside. It seemed he expected a fresh attack, and was considering personal ways and means in case the assault were effective. But instead of an attack there fell the silence of the grave, suddenly as if a great smothering blanket were dropped on the tumult. What was happening? Was it another ruse? Would the black stillness burst into devastating musket flame? Turning these questions over in his mind, Argyle stood motionless on the great stair, his ears strained to catch the least sound of motion without, his face drawn, his black figure grotesquely enlarged and caricatured in the swaying smoky light of the torches. Then he turned his face downward, glooming savagely.

"How many of you were against him?" he asked, in a hush as of death; and again, as none ventured to answer, "I ask how many of you were against him?"

"Seven, my lord," came the trembling reply.

"Seven," repeated Argyle, with ineffable scorn, "'twas liker seventy. A fine piece of intelligence this to gladden a commander's heart—one rebel worth seven Campbells, on their own showing, ay, on their own showing. I will have the thing chalked up on every

kirk door throughout the length and breadth of Argyle, that our friends there may know and rejoice in our valour."

One of the men laughed nervously by way of experiment, knowing indeed nothing else to do.

"Friend, I envy you your merriment," said Argyle. "For myself I'm near vomiting; a castle full of you against one man, and he goes off jauntily, laughing his contempt upon you. Have ye never handled swords before, that ye fall into this disgrace? Had ye not even spirit enough to imitate the bravery of Saul by turning your dishonoured blades upon yourselves? Ach, go back to your mothers, go and milk the goats on the hillside, 'tis all ye are fit for. I give ye a free pass to go and tell old wives' tales of your great deeds when seven men of you were not able to stand before one rebel."

He spoke with extraordinary bitterness, as a desperately brave man betrayed by recreants. And such was the man's art he covered his defect of courage so adroitly that then and always he was accepted by his own side as what he pretended to be, a great warrior and captain. The men now before him cowered under his words as under a lash.

"I wonder," he pursued in the same savage and biting tone, "I wonder if there be heart enough left in ye to bring me intelligence of what is doing without, or must I be my own orderly and scout?"

"Ay, my lord," answered two or three together. "We will bring you word or die."

"I am glad to hear it," was the response. "And pray you be good enough to keep that vow. I will in truth expect you to bring me tidings or die in the quest like men. Two of you go and the rest remain."

The men were hardly gone when there arose a fresh clamour outside, sharper and fiercer as it seemed to Argyle than the first.

"They are returning," he cried in an alarm which was not to be concealed. "Is my horse saddled? Say I'm gone forth to direct the defence." And with that he wheeled shamelessly and ran upstairs. The

next minute the rolling voice of Ardvoirlich resounded in the hall.

"The Marquis," he shouted. "The Marquis. Bring in your prisoner," he added with a backward look, and a dozen men followed, bringing in their midst—Sir William Rollock. Stewart, who knew Argyle's mind, as if it were a map spread out before him, went straight up the grand staircase, swelling with pride and exultation. Rollock followed painfully; he was wounded and bleeding. Next minute both stood once more before Argyle in Huntly's private cabinet.

"My lord," said Ardvoirlich, with a wave of the hand, "I present to you a guest who would fain evade your lordship's hospitality. If it please you, it would be well to give stricter charge concerning him in future. He is over-modest, my lord, and would slip into hiding."

Argyle, staring with his set, hard face, ignored this sally. Seated in Huntly's great chair he looked slowly from Ardvoirlich to Rollock. He could take his time now, since there was no enemy at the gate.

"So," says he, with a grim nod, "Sir William Rollock has come back; whole I trust"—catching sight of blood—"and in good health."

"Be assured, my lord," was the response, "that if he were whole, as your lordship trusts he is, he would not trouble you thus."

"Not a whit changed, not a whit changed," said Argyle, smiling maliciously. "Sir William Rollock was never a man for the small drum. Well, well, 'tis a handsome thing to be handsome. Courtesy begets courtesy. We will endeavour to repay. But first pardon us for attending to some pressing business. What of the enemy?"

"Gone like a trail of morning mist," replied Ardvoirlich.

"As usual," commented Argyle. "As usual. I mind me once in a London play-house how a wizard performed the feat of vanishing. 'Tis an art of which James Graham is master. Wrought they any mischief, James?"

"Nothing at all to speak of, my lord," was the lofty

reply. "A little blood about, as was to be expected; a man groaning here, a man squealing there, and mayhap one or two who have ceased to groan or squeal. That is all."

"It will be a lesson to our men," said Argyle. "Henceforth they will be more alert and watchful. There is something Scriptural in the actions of this fellow James Graham; for he cometh like a thief in the night. 'Tis the only Scriptural thing about him."

"James Graham," said Ardvoirlich, with a knowing air, "is now reduced to night forays like any other broken cateran of his kind. But I warrant he had as much as he can well and comfortably stomach this night."

"It were a pity to have him go away disappointed," remarked Argyle, with a masterful air.

"I judge by his speed in making off," said Ardvoirlich, "he is scarce satisfied. A thriving and contented man does not bolt like a brock to his hole."

"Mayhap the brock means to come forth again," rejoined Argyle. "James Graham is full of cunning. For the sake of our cause I would I had half his guile. These forays of his become troublesome. Let the guards be doubled; let no avenue of surprise be left open. For it comes about, James, that in ambuscadoes, night forays, thievish approaches and other devices of a despised and inferior foe he might strike and run. Thus a weak arm may inflict injury. But there," turning to Rollock with a sudden change of tone and expression, "we forget our guest and our good manners. How comes it that our old friend returns with you, James? Can it be that the valiant Sir William Rollock was overcome?"

"My lord, I will be frank with you," replied Rollock, his head proudly poised. "He was overcome."

"Tut, tut," said Argyle. "'Twas ever the fortune of war to put brave men to confusion. Was not the mighty Hector himself dragged shamefully at the cartail of the victorious Achilles? What was the mode of persuasion with Sir William?"

"An exceeding simple mode," put in Rollock before

Ardvoirlich could speak. "The fortune of war, which your lordship made mention of, decreed that one man should fight near a score. The natural thing happened; the score prevailed."

"Nay," cried Ardvoirlich, "I give your lordship my word there were not ten against him."

"We will not dispute over numbers," returned Argyle sweetly. "And what is the business now, Sir William?"

"Your pleasure, my lord, as it seems," answered Rollock indifferently.

"Ay," said Argyle, peering through half-closed lids. "And suppose the necessities of war compel me to take such measures as would prevent enforced guests from taking French leave?"

"That too would be the fortune of war," was the cool reply.

Argyle was smiling with a keen enjoyment of the situation. Another man would have spoken roughly and angrily; but Archibald Campbell, being once more in possession of his faculties, preferred smoothness to vehemence. In his creed only fools were vehement, and he was far from being a fool.

"A neck in jeopardy, Duncrab," he said, with a chuckle as of extreme good humour, "is no more to you than a trifling jest."

"My lord," responded Rollock, "when I undertook the present business I reckoned in my rough fashion what might be the cost. 'Twas a hasty calculation, but I abide by it. If the utmost price be exacted, I am ready and willing, so far as my poor ability goes, to pay." With which he folded his arms as one who has said his last word and said it in defiance.

A vindictive light shone in Argyle's crooked eyes, but was immediately quenched. "Duncrab," says he, more smoothly than ever, "I have a high regard for courage. 'Tis the jewel of manhood, though I deny not it may be fantastic on occasion. But 'tis the fantasy of a rare and high spirit. You have done so bravely to-night that 'tis now my pleasure to accept your parole—no guards, no chains, no barred or pad-

locked doors, only the word of honour of Sir William Rollock. Does he pledge it ? ”

“ My lord,” was the reply of the astonished Rollock, “ can it be pledged twice over ? Does your lordship think I went to Oxford and returned hither carrying my life in my hand just for the glee of an adventure ? ”

“ In good sooth,” rejoined Argyle. “ It were like Sir William Rollock to go further afield than Oxford for that same glee of adventure. But it amazes me somewhat to find him a casuist. Tut, you are too nice, Duncrab, too nice for these rough times. Conscience is as one takes it. Now give me your word, or if that be too much I will take it upon me, in the interest of honour, to dispense with even so slight a bond. You look astonished, old friend. Well, well, when next you hear his enemies abusing Argyle, saying he is suspicious, cherishes revenge and clips the wings and the claws of those in his power, think how you fared at his hands, how you were his prisoner and he set you free. Is that suspicion ? Is that cherishing revenge ? ”

“ Your lordship overwhelms me,” returned Rollock doubtfully.

“ Duncrab, if you please,” said Argyle softly, “ we will think only of the times that are past, ere these unhappy divisions arose to separate friends. May the happy reunion come swiftly. Meanwhile, I crave permission to look on you in very truth as my guest. Conduct Sir William below,” he added, turning to a junior officer who had come in with Ardvoirlich, “ and see to it that he hath comfort and his wound dressed.”

He rose and made a stately bow as Rollock, not well knowing how to take this unexpected turn of affairs, made a movement to follow his guide. Argyle stood a moment listening to the retreating footsteps, a strange, indecipherable smile on his face.

“ James,” he said, all at once turning upon Ardvoirlich, “ let it be your particular business to see he escapes not again. I have further use for him.”

Even Ardvoirlich stared in wonder ; but Argyle vouchsafed no explanation.

CHAPTER XIX

BROKEN MUSIC

SCARCELY was Rollock gone to a hospitality which caused him much wonder and doubt, when a visitor of a very different complexion claimed Argyle's attention, the Reverend Andrew Cant, to wit, whose militant zeal was without bound or limit. The little affair at Aberdeen put Mr. Cant's nose somewhat rudely out of joint. Like his fellow prophet of Markinch he had called vehemently for the unsheathing of swords, promising Burleigh and his valiants, in the name of the Lord of Hosts, their fill of vengeance. The sword came dripping, and behold the valiants spurring off the field for their lives.

In the first terror of the rout Mr. Cant rode desperately on the heels of his friends, crouching forward, a shuddering hump, on his horse's neck, his coat tails streaming like signals of distress on the wind, his ruffled wig bobbing and flapping at the back of his head like some malicious grey sprite exulting in his panic and urging him on. A terrible time of hardship, of jeering and flouting followed ; but the advent of Argyle and Lothian restored him to grace and set up his fallen reputation as prophet. He returned smacking his lips with a vengeful relish, and was by no means disposed to hide his triumph.

"Ah ! my friend, tidings ?" said Argyle cordially at sight of his lighted countenance and the clothes bespattered with hard riding over miry roads.

"My lord, my lord," replied Cant breathlessly, almost beside himself with elation and self-consequence,

"here are mercies beyond reckoning, mercies infinite and unexpected. I humbly congratulate your lordship and the realm."

Argyle regarded him a little quizzically as one who should ask, "What dance of deranged wits have we here?" His air would have been languid and indifferent but for the vigilant keenness of his eyes. "'Tis but a small thing to put a pack of rebels to flight," he returned, smiling as at a trifle.

"I refer not to your lordship's great and glorious victory," rejoined Cant in a panting excitement. "Though indeed the fame of it hath filled the land so that it is in all men's mouths as it will be in all the generations to come. Faith, your lordship has taught the rascals a lesson. But I mean now the particular mark of Heaven's favour last bestowed upon your lordship."

"Heaven chooses mean and weak instruments," said Argyle meekly. "Pray which is the last?"

"Can it be that your lordship has not heard?" cried Cant, fairly trembling with jubilation. "Am I then verily chosen as the unworthy messenger to bring the tidings of this joyous deliverance?"

"Not unworthy," Argyle returned, with a flattering smile. "Not unworthy, whatever the tidings. What is the deliverance?"

"My lord," answered Cant, in such a tremor of eagerness he could scarcely get his words out, "'tis my privilege to bring you the glad news that the perfidious wretch, heretic, rebel and traitor, James Graham, is dead."

For a moment Argyle was silent. Never (save in the extremity of fright) a man to let his feelings run away with him, he was doubly careful on such an occasion as this. Beside the tropical Mr. Cant he was as an iceberg.

"James Graham dead," he repeated slowly and without a jot of emotion. "Ay, you are right, this is indeed news. But a very little while ago methought James Graham was exceedingly alive. Well, all men must pay the debt of mortality. Tell me what was the manner

of his taking off. Which of our faithful friends and agents has done it ? ”

“ My lord,” replied Cant unctuously, “ God chooses His own mysterious ways and means.”

A queer expression came into Argyle’s face. “ My good friend, has it fallen to you to render this high and excellent service ? ” he asked.

“ Nay, nay, my lord,” Cant returned, with a deprecating modesty. “ ’Tis not my office to shed blood.”

“ ’Tis every good man’s office to do good,” rejoined Argyle, still with the same odd expression. “ I know full well it is in your heart to do much more than that. And despite your modesty ’twere most apt and fitting that one so full of zeal in the interests of both should do Heaven and the State this service. If thou hadst the devil fairly by the heels, friend Cant, methinks it would sooner enter thy head to put him for ever beyond mischief than to kneel and pray with him. But tell me of the whole matter.”

“ Briefly then, my lord,” was the reply, “ ’tis my agreeable duty to tell you that the great God of battles hath Himself slain James Graham with His avenging hand.”

“ Is this certainty or hearsay ? ” asked Argyle in a studiously passionless voice.

“ Certain as death itself,” Cant answered radiantly. “ There has come to me at Aberdeen a man direct from his camp, one of Huntly’s men, my lord, glamour’d for a little while by false lights and promises, but now repentant and in his right mind. He has fallen ill at Aberdeen, where he expected to find your lordship, else would I have brought him hither for your own questioning. But on your lordship’s behalf I examined the man circumstantially, and his news is true beyond a peradventure. James Graham, smitten with fever, died in a raging madness for his sins, and lies buried like an outcast and unclean thing among the wild mountains. It is a righteous judgment, my lord, a righteous judgment. For is there not the infallible word that vengeance shall overtake the wicked ? Said I not, my lord, it is a joyous deliverance ? ”

"Truly," responded Argyle, as with some secret doubt. "Yet I was thinking as you spoke that not many hours have passed since his rogues delivered two attacks upon us here, trifling things and easily repelled, but seeming to show that the foe is still active."

"Scattered remnants, my lord," Cant returned readily. "Scattered remnants. Wolves must need be on the prowl. But your lordship is as a lion in their midst, and though they snap and snarl in the dark yet will they in nowise stand."

"Why, and that is true," Argyle owned. "For indeed they strike like assassins in the night, and like assassins are off ere one can grip them. Desperation and despair work to such effects. It may be we have come to the last expiring effort of rebellion. As touching the great deliverance, where died he?"

"The vengeance of Heaven overtook him in Badenoch, my lord, fit enough place for the companion of caterans and cattle-lifters."

"Badenoch," said Argyle, pursing his mouth, "is a country of lies and deceit. Many a black monstrous falsehood comes from thence. It were vexatious to have Montrose die in Badenoch and come to life again in Strathbogie. I forget not that we have lately done much coursing with never a glimpse of the hare. Assuredly the rebels are fleet when we are on their track; now in Athole, now in Angus, anon by the Mills of Drum, again casting covetous eyes at Aberdeen."

"Ah," cried Cant, "they were well checkmated there. I warrant that after your lordship's coming to Aberdeen 'twas but a look with them and off. They are not lost in love of your lordship's company, ah ha."

"Their wits fail not in that," said Argyle complacently. "Is there any celebration of this deliverance? It would hearten the brethren mightily and mayhap bring some hesitating swords. There be always those, friend Cant, who prudently order their ways as the cat happens to jump."

"A very festival of rejoicing such as would do you good to hear and see, my lord," Cant replied effusively. "Men, women, and children shouting for joy and

singing psalms in the streets. 'Tis as if Satan had been caught and hurled bound into his own burning lake. Oh, I assure your lordship 'tis the most beautiful sight eye could behold. And my present business, if it please your lordship, is to confer with you touching a more general celebration."

"That were meet and proper," said Argyle, more briskly than he had yet spoken. "We must show a public sense of gratitude."

"An open acknowledgment of the Divine mercy, my lord," observed Mr. Cant.

"So," said Argyle, "have you thought of ways and means?"

"That I have, my lord," Cant replied blithely. "That I have. My plan in brief would be this, a plan approved by all the brethren and men of weight in Aberdeen, that in every church in the land there should be thanksgiving for the taking of the arch-traitor, persecutor, and disturber of the saints by the very stroke of Almighty vengeance. Thus would the people see and understand that it is the judgment of Heaven upon wickedness and treason to Kirk and State. Forby, the occasion would be fitting to give counsel and instruction of adherence to your lordship in all things touching the welfare of this troubled realm."

Argyle nodded approvingly.

"And moreover," pursued Cant, thus encouraged, "it would be established and proved by divers and proper means and authority that James Graham, having been destroyed by the just wrath of God as the agent and deputy of Satan in fomenting mischief and wickedly bringing the elect to shame and confusion, contrariwise your lordship would stand confirmed as the vicegerent of Heaven in bringing us out of the Egypt of our afflictions to the Canaan which is the promised and rightful inheritance of the righteous."

Though the flattery was rank even for the strong appetite of Argyle, he listened with the gravest attention, politely inclining his head from time to time to express general approval.

"You are too generous, my good friend," he returned

humbly in the end. "Your praise overleaps my poor merit in all things save my desire to serve the good and just cause. Do as you propose. Take all the measures which may seem to you fit. Let this crowning merey be advertised. And now I've another word for you."

He rose smiling and whispered in Cant's ear. A look of extreme astonishment and gratification came into Cant's face.

"I profess your lordship's wonders are without end," he cried in a pure rapture.

"Say nothing, say nothing," Argyle responded, with a smirk. "He is below," nodding at the floor, "one of my most privileged guests, a prisoner who fancies himself free. Your tidings somewhat alter my plans concerning him. But you know the proverb, keep a thing nine days and it will turn out useful. The lion must needs have his jackal, which will be the more serviceable by being nourished in the fond faith that it is itself a lion. The man hath a prodigious vanity. You should see him smile when I tickle."

"I took him for a fire-eating Gascon, my lord," Cant observed in surprise.

"Gascon for sure, and a fire-eater in his own fancy," Argyle returned. "But stroke him deftly and he will reward you with the most dulcet purring. We will hold him in reserve. Montrose is dead, but Alastair Colkitto Macdonald still lives. There is a complete pestilent knave for you as ever polluted Heaven's air with his breath."

"A worse than his master, if that were possible," Cant agreed.

"Well, well," said Argyle, "we may have him on the hip ere he knows it. And to that end we play the loving host to him you know of. I spy in our guest a most promising humour. You shall sup with the man and ply the divining rod for yourself. Then, as we continue our hunt for the skulking, scurrying heroes of rebellion you shall have escort back to Aberdeen while messengers ride post-haste to Edinburgh. I look for much good from this celebration."

Accordingly churches resounded with devout ejacu-

lations and thanksgiving, while Argyle, with a soldier's devotion to duty, flitted to and fro over Strathbogie in quest of the remnants of a discomfited foe. The celebrations over, Mr. Cant hurried back to his patron to report the gladsome proceedings and stimulate the troops with a discourse on the fate of rebels, rogues, and enemies in general. This was near the Castle of Fyvie, where Argyle rested to refresh his force and hear Mr. Cant's prelection. He had both dined and listened in deep satisfaction to a discourse from which it appeared that Satan was at last well dead and the angel of light and leading standing triumphant over the fallen rebel, when a man rode up, wild-eyed with the urgency of his message.

"What is it?" Argyle asked, with a sudden apprehension.

"My lord," was the answer, "the rebels are in possession of Fyvie Castle and wood, and Montrose is with them."

Argyle stared at the man a second and then turned to Cant. "Ah! friend Cant, friend Cant," he said, with a queer expression, "what said I of Badenoch and the resurrection of the dead?"

CHAPTER XX

VALOUR IN ADVERSITY

IN truth there was acute amazement on both sides. If Argyle, with qualms of misgiving it may be, accepted the news that Montrose was dead and done with, Montrose (being monstrously ill-served by his scouts) believed that Argyle, true to himself and the principle of keeping out of reach, was as usual several days' march in the rear. But Fate shook her dice, and behold Montrose alive again. Behold, too, a yet greater wonder—Argyle in touch, and actually pushing to the combat.

His valour, to be sure, was grounded on the belief that Mr. Cant reported the truth, and that the force at Fyvie was but a remnant of marauding rogues and vagabonds taken to thieving on their own account after their leader's death. He had known for some time that Colkitto was again in the west country, having been despatched thither, in desperation as was averred, to bring in the backward, sulking clans that were supposed to have some leaning towards royalty, or as many of them as could be coaxed or coerced into open rebellion. Macdonald must needs pick his living by the way, which he did with much gusto and the usual trail of blood and ashes. Notwithstanding that boast of the far cry to Lochow, Argyle trembled at the thought of a war carried into the heart of his own territory. Left to himself he would have sent the main portion of his own army in pursuit of the devastating Colkitto. But partly at the urging of the Committee of Estates, partly by the eager insistence of his officers he kept on the track of Montrose, though ever as it were with an

eye over his shoulder at the doings in Lorn and its borders. Making a virtue of necessity, he put on a brave front. If his men knew how to die properly he might yet emerge a great captain. Besides, the pledged word could not be broken without some fair excuse.

"We advance," he said now, with the air of Jove; and the rumour ran that the great event for which the Estates' General had been planning so patiently through ill-fortune was at hand, and that now in very truth the world would be astonished. "We advance," he said, and, remember, there is to be no quarter. Catch them, crush them, put an end to rebels and rebellion, and get back in glory to your wives and bairns."

The army cheered: here were the accents of victory.

Montrose held Fyvie Castle, but to avoid a trap he drew his men out on a slope broken by the dykes and ditches of farmers. It was little his habit to intrench, but the disparity, particularly in cavalry, was so great that even his ardent and daring spirit durst not risk a descent to the plain. When the odds are three to one caution becomes a military virtue.

He had just got his men disposed when an event happened which made the blood cold at his heart. By prayer, by protestation and appeal he had brought some five score Gordon horsemen with him out of Strathbogie. All at once, as he was giving final orders, he noticed them clustering together in evident excitement. The next minute they turned abruptly, putting spurs to their horses.

"What means it, Ardlogie?" Montrose asked Nathaniel Gordon, who stood by. Ardlogie's answer was a cry of shame and horror, followed by a wild oath. "My lord," he said, flushing savagely, "oh, that I were among them with twenty good blades at my back."

"It were their deserts," said Montrose, his eyes fast on the recreant horsemen, now making off at the gallop. "Desertion, and at a moment like this. I almost repent me, Ardlogie, that I forbade you to bring in their chief according to your purpose."

"To deal gently with the Marquis of Huntly is to stroke a wolf," said Ardlogie. "He bites the hand that

fondles. Believe me, my lord, this is the doing of Geordie Gordon, and none other."

But there was no time for reproaches. The Gordons had deserted; that treachery was beyond a doubt. Montrose watched them gallop down the hill and skirt the wood of Fyvie within plain sight of the enemy, as though to say, "Work your will; our hand is not against you." And the enemy, profiting by the information, immediately advanced.

Fearing the effect of this desertion on his inferior and discouraged force, Montrose went hurriedly among his men, cheering them, as the devoted Wishart observes, "with the memory of their past achievements and native valour." Never was such a miracle of buoyancy, hope, and courage. His face gleamed as though behind the packed ranks of the foe he spied the goddess of victory herself beckoning him on. "Men," he told his followers in a voice that was a trumpet-call, "you have seen what has happened. Give thanks that we are rid of the incumbrance of cowards. We have cast the treacherous and the fearful, and have now the felicity to rely wholly and solely upon ourselves. In all the wide world could we have better aid? Comrades, I rejoice in you. Remember your own honour and the justice of your cause. Be not dismayed by the trumpeting of the foe; it will not bring down the walls of Jericho. Repeat the glorious deeds you have already performed. Trust yourselves, be stout, and you will again be conquerors."

The response was an enthusiastic roar. "While your lordship is with us we are ready for anything," some one called.

"Be assured, I do not mean to turn deserter," he called in reply. "Let us not forget that the brave ever bear charmed lives. Whom Heaven protects neither steel nor lead can harm. See you, the enemy comes to rejoice us. Were ever men more timely and accommodating? Now, my lads, think of the past, remember its glories, be yourselves, and the king shall again have joy of you."

Yet for all this gay confidence, meant to inspire his

men, he thought with deep pity of the king, and prayed for the return of Colkitto.

The enemy, courageous in his clear advantage, was already well advanced, and presently a charge, gallantly led by Keith, brother of the Earl Marischal, won for Argyle's musketeers the lower slopes and ditches. It was a moment to shake the heart of almost any commander. Montrose noted the peril, yet smiled serenely. "O'Cahan, what are yonder fellows about?" he said, turning to Colkitto's young lieutenant-colonel, now in command of all that remained of the Irish. "I protest the impudent rogues are among our defences. Take some of your hardiest men, drive them off, and see they molest us not again."

The order was scarcely given when O'Cahan was leaping down the slope with a company as wildly ardent as himself. "I am sorry to send brave men to their death," thought the general, watching them. "Naught but the necessity of war would induce me to it." But for once even Montrose miscalculated; for so sudden, so furious, so astoundingly audacious was the onset that in a moment, as it appeared, the enemy's musketeers were driven pell-mell on their own horse. "Well done! well done!" Montrose shouted in a boyish ecstasy, and instantly the whole army took up the shout. O'Cahan paid no heed; he was engrossed with captured bags of powder, which he viewed in a comical disappointment.

"Tuts," he said to his men, "see what the beggarly knaves have done. They have gone off without leaving bullets for the powder. We must at them again, the stingy shopkeepers."

Argyle retorted with five troops of Lothian's horse, which charged the Royalist cavalry, again reduced to a poor half-hundred, and would have destroyed them but for the general's old expedient of intermixing them with light musketeers. These brought so many flashing swords to earth that without waiting to get home the whole five troops wheeled in disorder, and galloped back to the usual feat of throwing their own ranks into confusion. Thereupon Highlanders and Irish leaped

up together, yelling for a general charge. But Montrose was on a ditch-head in front, beseeching them to curb their fury. "My gallant lads, it is splendid," he told them. "But remember your duty, and wait."

"But see, my lord, they retreat," pleaded O'Cahan, whose appetite had been merely whetted by the brush on the lower defences.

"Yes, yes, they retreat," said Montrose; "'tis their way. But this time we will not pursue. Forget not, O'Cahan, the golden rule of war—never to do what the enemy wishes you. They would lure us down to swallow us. Besides," and he lowered his voice as though for O'Cahan's ear alone, "though we have powder, thanks to you, we have no shot."

"They have, my lord," was the prompt rejoinder. "Give us leave to go and fetch it for ourselves."

"Nay, nay," laughed Montrose, "how could I face Macdonald if he returned to find his colonel the guest of the Earl of Argyle? Already too many of our friends are entertained in that camp. Better bide a wee. Well for us that Argyle, whose spies do him such excellent service, knows not of our exhausted resources. What joy it would bring him to learn we are without bullets."

"Troth then, my lord," rejoined O'Cahan, "'tis my honest opinion my lord of Argyle loves hostile steel just as little as lead. See him draw off. Ah! but 'tis a grievous pity to let him go so."

"My gay leopard," was the response, "you shall presently have your leap at his throat with a better chance of bringing your stag down. Meanwhile, let us dote an hour on the virtue of prudence."

Argyle did not discover the lack of bullets. Instead, he found by various convincing auguries that the time for striking the final blow of vengeance was still a little way off. Wherefore he recrossed his Rubicon, otherwise the river Ythan, to ponder the perverse and vexing course of events. It was bitter brooding, and involved much censure of others. If his foot would but fling themselves blindly on hostile pikes; if his cavalry forgot for once in a way how to retreat; if, in short,

an army could win battles without a leader, then were Argyle always victorious. To his officers he now bore himself as though they had conspired for his defeat. He well knew the best of them despised him in their hearts, and the injured air and sullen brow of reproof were at once his refuge and his means of retaliation.

Meanwhile, a high and jubilant spirit pervaded the enemy. Fyvie Castle hummed and bustled like an arsenal. For throughout the long November night its holders were busy melting dishes, flagons, pots, and whatever other pewter ware could be converted into bullets. It was joyous and exhilarating sport. It was yet better sport using the improvised ammunition when Argyle, sour, taciturn, and without heart, advanced next morning under pretence of attacking. The attacked received him with flouts and jeers. "Sure as a gun I have spoiled another traitor's face with the pot," one would call. "Ay, ay," would come the merry response. "Nothing serves the countenance so well as pewter. Some more, dear friends, some more," as another discharge put terror into Argyle.

Four days he advanced thus every morning with a round of trumpets, and every evening retired across his protecting river, a comedy of war which evoked plentiful mirth and contempt. Amused, but by no means willing to continue a game of farce, Montrose made a night march to Strathbogie on the track of the deserters, and once more took possession of Huntly's Castle. Argyle must needs follow, like a timorous hunter following a lion for very shame of having his cowardice marked. He put an artful face on it, however, comforting his vexed and disappointed men with the promise of forcing a decisive and glorious battle. But it seemed that mere contact with Montrose must always send his courage oozing. After a skirmish or two, he found somewhat suddenly that the moment for the *coup de grâce* was not yet come.

Then it pleased the master of intrigue to request a truce, and propose a conference and treaty. With an inimitable air of concession he sent his flag to Montrose

asking for a cessation of arms and hoping that mutual pledges would ensue.

"Truce and conference by all means," Montrose told the envoy, "on condition that I have safe conduct for despatches to his Majesty the King."

"Let us first confer," returned Argyle with feline blandness. "What," he said to himself, "does James Graham mean to checkmate me at my own game? Tut, tut, children and fools should not meddle with men's work."

But Montrose, having learned somewhat by experience, was by no means disposed to walk into the net on the spider's invitation.

"You treat me unkindly, my lord," Argyle sent him word. "I sue for peace and behold you wave a sword in my face. 'Tis scarce for the good of our poor distracted land."

"There is an easy and present remedy for all the ills of our land," Montrose rejoined. "Let the king's enemies lay down their arms and all will be well."

"Heyday," said Argyle, pursing his mouth, "as my lord Coriolanus has it, hear you this Triton of the minnows?"

CHAPTER XXI

BEHIND THE ARRAS

"Bid Major Stewart of Ardvoirlich come to me here. I desire two minutes with him in private," said Argyle one evening to an attendant; and for an hour the two men were shut together. Gillespie Gruamach was rubbing his hands in satisfaction. "Well, James," he observed, almost gleefully, "events progress. Think you the time is ripe and ready?"

"For the harvest, my lord, for the harvest," was the instant reply.

"Doubtless you have thought of plans," said Argyle, his small eyes twinkling keenly.

With infectious gusto Ardvoirlich unfolded his scheme, which had already been the subject of secret conference between them; Argyle listening with a grave attention which broke into a smile of approval.

"Were I converting the heathen you were my very evangelist," he cried. "Whom would you depute for this great task? You cannot go yourself. After the little affair of Collace I fear me your welcome would be but indifferently cold."

"Nay, my lord, it would be exceeding hot," laughed Ardvoirlich. "That small affair, it appears, has bred a mighty splore. Alan Macnab, whom your lordship doubtless knows as a near neighbour and friend, I hear has taken a vow before Heaven to be avenged, which is to say, my lord, that they covet my most unhappy head."

"I warrant 'twill trouble him to keep that vow," Argyle said encouragingly. "Yet is it a wild cat with the sharpest of claws. Once done with our present

business we must teach Master Alan a lesson. Too many of his beef barrels have been filled with cattle bearing the Lorn brand. He will disgorge presently. Meantime who are your men for this honourable and important venture ? ”

“ I have here the names, my lord,” replied Ardvoirlich. “ Every man of them sifted and proved. I warrant your lordship will not find a slack hand or a relenting heart among them.” Taking the list, Argyle went carefully and quietly through it, pricking off the names of such as especially deserved Ardvoirlich’s praise.

“ A goodly list,” he observed. “ These faithful friends will have their opportunity. From this and other measures in hand I hope for the richest fruit. James, what think you of this ? ”

Argyle in turn exhibited a paper which he handed to Ardvoirlich. “ This is big, my lord,” was Ardvoirlich’s comment on reading it. “ Big, and, by your leave, somewhat astonishing. A free pass and exemption ? ”

“ To the nobles and gentlemen,” replied Argyle. “ What think you of it ? ”

“ I have but one word to say,” responded Ardvoirlich. “ Is it wise, my lord, is it wise ? ”

Argyle laughed quietly. For all his darkness, Ardvoirlich was but a child after all. “ When my lads would catch an eagle or a fox,” said the master of craft, “ they bait the trap fittingly and becomingly. Methinks we follow that admirable plan here. Every man detached will be a loss to the other side. And I need not tell you, James, that as the laird goes so goes the man. Get the gentry out of the way and Montrose’s ragged-backs would melt like snow in April sun and rain. I look for much gain from this small offer.”

“ ’Tis wondrous kind, my lord,” said Ardvoirlich, who could not quite fathom Argyle’s subtlety.

“ We would be generous, James,” Argyle returned. “ Methinks I can hear our opponents laughing and crying out that Argyle in his dotage has betaken himself to deeds of charity. So, in truth, he has. I make certain offers, as thus and thus ? ‘ kind ’ you say, indeed most kind. I sink my plain advantage. I for-

give mine enemies. I am Montrose's humble suitor. Argyle on his knees suppliant before James Graham. James, see if that feather tickle not his vanity."

"There is enough, my lord, for the tickling," Ardvoirlich owned.

"On that side man was never better endowed," said Argyle. "Yet he is suspicious withal, and inclined to look a gift horse in the mouth. Even to our generosity he may say 'No.'"

"And what then, my lord?" asked Ardvoirlich.

"Then, James, I will draw my face so," Argyle answered, and with a grimace he simulated a look of great dolefulness. "Also I will speak somewhat in this fashion, 'My lord of Montrose, you are pleased to spurn me; but to prove mine honesty here is my bond that these noblemen and gentlemen may return to their homes if they list without let, hindrance, or subsequent molestation.' And, hark you, if we rid not ourselves of some troublesome swords, there is more honesty in man than I reckon of."

"I profess your lordship were too deep for the very serpent himself," Ardvoirlich cried in admiration.

"Nay, you must not flatter, James," Argyle returned. "Then again, you see, certain of these good friends whose names you give me, will go to the enemy in the guise of deserters. I have prepared me some speeches for the ear of Montrose, as this, that victory sits ever perched on his banner, and for that reason they would fain join him; that I am a lost man, that the ship, in a word, is leaking abominably, and that the rats would save themselves by a timely discretion. Moreover, they would whisper this, that they came not only with information, but also with swords to hasten the inevitable end. You perceive, James, the twist of events. 'Twas a most excellent trick of thine going over with Kilpont, but 'tis a pity the hand struck not the right man."

"The hand struck where it did for secrecy and your lordship's honour," Ardvoirlich replied, as if resenting the implied reflection.

"True, true," Argyle admitted in a tone of honey.

"My honour was ever safe in your hands, and as for secrecy, what is more secret than a dead man's mouth? We will be surer of our measures this time. These fellows," glancing at the paper, "have a ready hand, and dislike not the sight of blood. I hear Colkitto's return from the west is daily expected. He will be flushed with pride. So will Montrose. Easily taken, you see. The thing done, you and I go to Edinburgh to receive our reward. Keep all tight as the grave for a little while till our scheme blossom of itself. And now send me Will Rollock. You see he has not broken his parole as was prophesied of him."

"He could not," replied Ardvoirlich, "because I made it my business to have ever, as it were, a hand on his wrist, according to your lordship's instructions."

"You have played the warder well," said Argyle graciously. "I will not forget your fidelity, James. Well, the time is at hand to use Sir William Rollock. He has fared well with us, has he not? I mean he has eaten and drunk to his stomach's content. He is a gross feeder, as I have marked, but somewhat nice in his drink. Your Royalist had ever a palate for good wine."

"He has fared on the best, my lord," Ardvoirlich assured him. "There were times when he was as a calf of the stall fed for the table."

"Tough eating for loose teeth, I fear," said Argyle pleasantly. "Nevertheless, Will Rollock has been fed for a purpose. Till it be executed, wink and look innocent. Keep your own counsel against coming events. In these days of defection the very winds search out men's thoughts and fly abroad with them. Secret as the grave, James, wise as the serpent, 'tis the only safe rule. And now send the son of Belial to me. See you if I knead not that vapouring piece of clay sweetly to mine own ends."

Rollock found Argyle seated with the wine ready, his lean countenance wreathed in smiles of welcome.

"I was weary of babblement," said the great man when his guest was at ease over a brimming glass. "Babble, babble, babble, oh! how mine ears ache.

One would think, Duncrab, that many people are endowed with speech for no other purpose than just to proclaim the windy void within. Praters, praters. how they afflict the world! 'Tis the misery of my position that I am a fair mark for every fool to shoot at, that every addle-pated fellow must needs encumber me with counsel concerning the vast multitude of things he does not understand. Ah me! sometimes I would I were stone deaf. Come, drink, and tell me how you like the vintage."

"Excellently well, my lord," answered Rollock, with convincing sincerity. "It hath the right smack and relish of age."

"Disdain it not, then," said Argyle, with the cordiality of a boon toper. "Let me whisper you a secret, 'twas chosen for you. I said to myself, 'Duncrab relishes such and such a vintage.' Nay, do not burden me with undeserved thanks. Argyle, I hope, has still a heart for a friend. I hold with the good Cicero, that he on whom Heaven bestows a friend may for the most part let the world whistle. I tell you frankly, Duncrab, your conduct touches me; free to go and yet content to remain on the slight holding of a spoken word. Were I a preacher methinks I should find there matter for a discourse on honour. Nay, you need not look your modest deprecation at me, Duncrab. 'Tis my vice ever to speak mine honest thought bluntly. Tut, you drink lamely. Nay, nay, man, mellow wine is not an evil spirit to fly away with you."

"Your lordship is too pressing hospitable," replied Rollock, not without a touch of the courtier.

"You must not put me to shame," rejoined Argyle archly. "To speak the honest truth I have neglected hospitality most abominably. But you know how the course of my life runs, broil and battle, fret and fever, scarce a moment to ask a friend 'How fares it with you?' Public tumults make not for private felicity. Yet must we endure as we can."

"The common lot, my lord, as I read it," said Rollock, with the air of a philosopher.

"It boots nothing to whimper," responded Argyle,

like one with a heart for the worst. "Better is it to call to mind our sturdy Scots motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit*. There is luck in flinging your gage in Fortune's face and saying to the jade, 'Have at it.' Bold wooing makes ever the successful lover. Tell me, Duncrab, is not the well-being of his country a patriot's first concern?"

"His very first, my lord," was the answer.

"Then you would say, would you not, that any measure which might ensure the national peace and security were justified before God and man?"

"Surely, my lord."

"It gives me joy to hear you say so," replied Argyle radiantly. "For I tell you the present course of events often galls my heart. Yet what am I to waver in the path of duty? What am I to cry, 'Halt' when Heaven itself orders me on? I dare not, Duncrab, I dare not. And for that men abuse me, call me vile names, such as usurper, plotter, self-seeker, and what not, all the vile words that come so easily to the gabbling tongue. But you are a man of sense, Duncrab, and I ask you this, is it self-seeking to have my territory plundered, my life endangered, my peace broken and banished, my friends slain, all for the sake of the public good? Were I a self-seeker, methinks I could find better means of profit. There has even been a traitorous whisper that I cherish designs on the crown itself. Ladywell's head answered in part for that lie. But if justice had her own some who go bravely about to-day were as silent as he. But tut, why do I talk thus? Better men than I have lost everything for their country—kindred, friends, goods, estate, all save their own honour and loyalty. Why should I complain? Believe me, 'tis the face of a friend that makes the tongue run so."

"Your lordship has the sustaining joy of a good conscience," said Rollock, with sly unction.

"Without the approval of that sacred monitor," returned Argyle, with at least equal unction, "I would hie me home to-morrow, shake off for ever the galling burden of public care, and take mine ease within mine own enclosure. But forgive me, Duncrab, I weary

you. All this came ere I was aware of it, because you see a friend's look draws forth the thoughts of the heart. Am I right, Duncrab, in thinking that during these late weeks you have conceived some liking for me ? ”

“ I am much beholden to your lordship,” returned Rollock, with a grateful bow.

“ We will not talk of that,” said Argyle softly. “ You have some liking for Argyle because you see him for yourself, and not through the eyes of detractors. Give me leave to think so at least. ’Twere sweet to be so deluded. You know the manner of your coming ; have I stinted your coming or your going ? ”

“ Your lordship has indeed been most wondrous kind.”

“ In proof of which, if you desire to leave me now I say to you, you are at liberty ; rise and go, no barrier shall be opposed to you.”

“ In truth, my lord, I know good entertainment when I find it.”

“ ’Tis not half what I would have it,” said Argyle. “ But ’tis the best I can contrive in present circumstances. You may marvel why I have treated you like a brother.”

“ Indeed I have, my lord, many a time and oft.”

“ Well, I will tell you. It is because I have an eye for honour and know whom to trust. You played me a scurvy trick with the despatch ; but shall I say it was over the wine ? At any rate it was ere we knew each other. Since then I have made it my business to observe you closely, and believe me, Duncrab, I have learned to hold you dear. Nay, do not be surprised. There are men whom Argyle for all his simplicity would not take to his soul. You are a shrewd judge, Duncrab. Tell me, have I at any time pushed my advantage cruelly ? Have I even said to my men, ‘ Take vengeance and spare not ’ ? ”

“ Your lordship has been most soft and gentle,” replied Rollock, wondering whither he was being led.

“ Yet mine enemies deny me the bowels of compassion,” said Argyle sorrowfully. “ Well, well, one

must not be disconsolate. Suffering is the badge of all patriots and well-doers, in times like these. You too, Duncrab, love and pity our distracted country. Ay, ay, you need not assure me of it. What can a man give more than his life? And so much Sir William Rollock was prepared to surrender. Think not I flatter. Say rather I would be just. Tut," he cried, with a sudden change of tone, "while we talk the glass stands idle. I protest the young men of to-day forget how to drink. I will take it exceeding ill, Duncrab, if these bottles go not away empty."

He filled his guest's glass, rose, stepping soft-footed as a cat to the door, which he tried, to make sure it was fast, and with the same feline quietness returned to his place and again filled his guest's glass.

"I protest, my lord," cried Duncrab. "The drinking is all on one side. Your lordship is as sober in wine as if bred in a nunnery."

Argyle drew a long face and sighed. "Ah! drinking goes with a light, free heart," he returned. "Argyle's is sick and heavy."

"Perchance your lordship is weary," said Rollock, making as if to retire.

"I beseech you do not leave me," pleaded Argyle. "I am a lonely man, Duncrab, beset by spies and sycophants, scarce one I can trust. I envy Montrose the loyalty of his friends." And then with a melting earnestness, he added, "Would to God I had but one man of the stuff of Duncrab. That journey to Oxford and back, what a heart it betokens."

"But your lordship has many friends," said Rollock in a voice of surprise.

"Many who call themselves friends," said Argyle. "Men mighty in profession, and of great valour and wisdom in speech, Hectors whose words simulate the very thunder of Jove. But 'tis my misfortune to love deeds more than words. Think not Argyle weak if he confess to you that his soul yearns for the aid and fellowship of a man. Sir William Rollock can give him both."

Eyes and voice were full of a soft yet passionate

appeal. Imagine one whose heart is strained to cracking by defection and disloyalty, and you have the mood he presented. Yet all the while he was watching the other like a fox, or perhaps more particularly like a serpent.

"Your lordship would lean on a poor reed," Rollock replied modestly.

"Say not that, say not that," Argyle responded quickly. "Before Heaven I would not have any man break his faith. But think you, my dear friend, of the chances of error: for honour being as the war-horse for eagerness, has oftentimes no eyes for the breach in itself. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus till he went on that journey to Damascus, a most notable and instructive example. And I whisper it only for your most private ear, 'tis not Argyle's way to forget them who befriend him in time of need. Honours and rewards will presently come thick and fast."

"Your lordship's followers are indeed fortunate," observed Rollock.

"There is this in it, Duncrab," was the response, "that whatever may become of his own, Argyle will make the fortunes of his friends. And this is the thought in my mind, why should not Sir William Rollock have his share? There, not a word of thanks. So, I see agreement in your looks, only mark you let the thing be known to Heaven and ourselves alone. Shall we just for friendship's sake take an oath of secrecy upon it?" He had swung round to the playful and was beaming joyously.

"As your lordship pleases," answered Rollock, to whom an oath was perhaps no great matter when the case was important.

"Nay, on second thoughts that were to throw doubt on honour," said Argyle, with an expression of implicit trust. "Rather pledge we each other. Good wine was ever a bond of amity. I give you this pledge then. To the success of our secret, and may the tongue that reveals it wither at the root."

CHAPTER XXII

THE FOX AND THE WEASEL

IN the chill, bleak dusk of the November evening a wondrous sight made the whole camp gape. First Argyle was seen taking a most affectionate leave of Rollock, openly and with ceremony as if he did it for all to see ; next James Stewart, smiling and mincing, conducted his quondam prisoner through the ranks of staring, amazed men. What did the thing mean ? Why this courtesy, this sudden change of mien and treatment ? Remembering Ardvoirlich's strict injunctions concerning the watch that was to be kept on Rollock, the quicker spirits guessed some deep stroke of policy, and watched in a tremor of expectation. Ever since his heroic feat at Collace Ardvoirlich was a man marked for dark or desperate undertakings. Was Rollock to share the fate of Kilpont ?

They saw Argyle turn on his heel, well pleased as it seemed, after the congé, and that quickened both their wonder and their curiosity. A few essayed to follow the retreating pair, cautiously as it were under a pretext of duty ; but they returned to their fellows no wiser than they went. Ardvoirlich and his companion walked swiftly on, past the pickets and into the night. The spies forced to stop, listened with intent ear and bated breath for a cry, the noise of a scuffle, a groan, anything to indicate that the deed of darkness was done ; but the only sound was that of some disturbed hill bird screaming out its fear. If it were a deed of darkness, the darkness covered it. They must wait.

Ardvoirlich came back presently, with long purposeful

strides, and the look of a man who has got through a big business to his satisfaction. Many would fain have looked to his dirk for blood. But none durst venture, Argyle's hand being too manifest in the affair. A hush of awe took the camp, such as falls on men after a great battle or the commission of uncanny deeds. What did the night hide away out yonder? A stark man with red, gaping wounds? One might judge so by the elation of Ardvoirlich as he disappeared into Argyle's tent.

Gillespie Gruamach sat by himself in a deep muse between two sputtering candles. At Ardvoirlich's entrance he turned with a look of expectancy.

"Well, James," he said, "you have put him safely beyond our lines? Our fellows are too quick with the dirk. It were folly to let him go forth alone. I would not have him sent to his account just yet. Hark'e James," he went on, "if we have not this night done what will cost James Graham his dearest penny, then are some men compounded of deceit and falsehood. Our man is most promising, and of the other thing also I have great hope."

"The other thing, my lord?" said Ardvoirlich.

"The proclamation, man," was the impatient retort. "The humble petition of Argyle begging Montrose of his grace to grant a conference; the call for peace, the offer of a free pass and pardon to every rebel who would return to his home. You cannot say it lacks generosity."

"I had liefer it were a drawn sword, my lord," commented Ardvoirlich.

"In good sooth James Stewart there speaks like himself," was the reply. "Argyle would try more peaceable means than bruilzie and bloodshed. You were not born, my dear James, for the art which weaves its invisible web more cunningly than the spider, ay, and catches its fly, too. If Adam understood it the serpent had never triumphed in Eden and we had all been gainers. I rely not too much on that same sword of yours. We have Scripture for it that a soft word turneth away wrath. Jehu the son of Nimshi and all his noisy clan were fools and braggarts. I would not

libel human nature, yet can I not deny a deep and abiding faith in its corruptibility. James Graham would make you a pretty song about chivalry. Mark how the thing will serve him. And now, James, I find myself with a yearning for more companionship. Tell some of our friends I would have a beaker with them."

The company was still jolly over its wine when word was brought to Argyle that a fellow had arrived in extreme haste, desiring to speak with him, and stood under guard without.

"See what he wants, James," Argyle told Ardvoirlich. But all the henchman could get for answer was that the message must be delivered to the Marquis alone.

"Be pleased then to lay aside that dirk of yours, my good fellow," Ardvoirlich told the man. "There is always the danger of mishaps with the pesky things. And that pistol from your belt. In faith it looks a bonnie weapon; but you come not for the foray, man, you come not for the foray. Oh, you will have everything back if all goes right at the fair. So," as the man not too willingly or with too good a grace delivered up his weapons, "take it not ill if I just run my hand over you for form's sake. You know what the times are."

The disarming done, Ardvoirlich led the man in, and on a word that all was safe Argyle stepped aside with him. The two whispered together a moment, and then the messenger, lowering his voice as if to prevent the company from hearing, breathed something which made Argyle's face all at once gleam. But the light was instantly exchanged for the inscrutable, unimpassioned look which Argyle invariably wore when matters of great moment were in hand.

"You bring me an extraordinary tale," he said loud enough for the others to hear. "You are sure of its truth?"

"May I be struck dead if it is not as I tell your lordship," the messenger replied earnestly. "He bid me say that if your lordship means to be honest with poor cavaliers I am to take him back a token."

Argyle gripped his foxy beard, his face screwed into the oddest expression of perplexity. "A token," he repeated. "A token; must I then give all pledges and get none? Have I not already given the best of tokens? How am I to know there is not some hidden wicked design in this? Nay, nay, I will not deny your sincerity," as the other in a panic of anxiety broke into protestations. "But you may be mistaken yourself. Let us suppose,—remember 'tis but supposition—let us suppose that this is a trick, that some one knowing Argyle's free and open nature would practise upon him, sound all his notes and stops as if he were just a common bag-pipe, what then? I mind not for myself, but I have an army to take care of and the responsibility of a great cause. There's the rub."

The man protested afresh, but Argyle saw fit to maintain the dubious air. "So, so," he responded enigmatically. "So, so." And then elbow in palm, hand to chin, he appeared to consider deeply. All at once he turned to the company behind.

"Which of you is in heart for an adventure?" he asked blandly. "I have here a message of great import which I would have proved. That means going out into the darkness at some hazard, yes at some little hazard. I am in doubt; which of you will bring me certainty?"

They were all of course eager volunteers. But Argyle had his own plan and his own man for carrying it out.

"Not all," he replied in the same bland tone. "Not all. Ardvoirlich, since this man has already been through your hands give him another turn for me. He is somewhat mysterious and proposes a secret meeting."

"An honest meeting as I live, my lord," put in the messenger.

"For your sake I hope it may be so," Argyle returned significantly, "Have you prayed before coming hither?"

"Your lordship is pleased to jest," said the man uncomfortably.

"The chance of having one's thrapple cut is a most excellent jest," was the response. "Not every one would relish it, however."

"My lord," said the man, "what is my life or the life of any fellow like me when a great thing is at stake? If I lead not this gentleman," making a bow of profound respect to Ardvoirlich, "to the appointed place and the thing ye wot of, then may his sword execute a quick vengeance upon me."

"Make it a bargain, James," said Argyle, with unconscious eagerness. "And now since there is need of haste, go swiftly. We will here await your return."

Upon which Ardvoirlich and the messenger passed into the darkness together.

CHAPTER XXIII

SPLENDIDE MENDAX

IN the same hour, almost in the same moment, Rollock entered the Royalist camp, which he found in a singular commotion and disorder. For once, too, Montrose himself showed unmistakable signs of agitation. He was noticeably pale, and it was obvious that Rollock's arrival recalled him from vexed and dejected thoughts. His greeting, however, was as cordial and engaging as ever.

"Back from the dead," he cried, seizing his old comrade's hand in a boyish fervency of gladness. "Back from the dead. My lord of Argyle has such a gift of hospitality that indeed I misdoubted if we were ever to set eyes on you again. Well, and how has it fared with you since we parted?"

"You shall hear, my lord," Rollock answered. "But first how has it fared with your lordship?"

"Of that too we can talk anon," was the reply. "We will speak now of weightier matters. Bring you any word from his Majesty? You saw him?"

"I did, my lord."

"Tell me how he looked," Montrose said, with the fond eagerness of a lover. "Was he happy? Did he appear as one who is heartened by the course of fortune?"

"In truth, my lord, I thought he looked somewhat troubled," Rollock returned. "This upstart, Cromwell, vexes him sorely and it grieves him to think of the rebellion here in Scotland."

"Dear heart," said Montrose. "Please God we will

rid him of that. What word bring you from him, Rollock? Tell me all."

"His Majesty," replied Rollock, "was rejoiced to hear of your lordship's glorious victories, and sent greetings."

"Sent he naught else, Rollock?" Montrose asked quickly. "Sent he naught else? I could have swallowed up Argyle in the fury of my impatience to have you free and hear the king's message. Sent he written word?"

"My lord," said Rollock, with a hesitating and abashed look, "his Majesty did indeed deliver to me with his own hand a written message for your lordship."

"Let me have it then, my good Rollock," was the eager response. "Never was I more in need of it. But why, Rollock, what ails you that you blench so?"

"My lord, my lord," cried Rollock, acute pain in his voice, "'tis my eternal shame that I cannot deliver the king's message into your lordship's hands. I got it safely away from the Roundheads,—your lordship shall hear of that adventure presently. But what was fetched without scathe from Oxford was lost in Strathbogie."

"Lost in Strathbogie," Montrose repeated like one confused by a cruel blow. "But 'twas not thy fault, Rollock," he added instantly. "Not thine, I am sure. Only tell me all."

In a breathless rush Rollock described his capture by Ardvoirlich, and the finding of the despatch in the sole of his boot, Montrose listening with every sense aquiver.

"But it profited him nothing," Rollock added, with a note of pride. "The manner of it was this, my lord. Calling me to him, as it were playfully and without serious intent, Argyle descanted on the crabbed character of the writing, challenging me to decipher what he could not read. He had cunningly plied me with wine, thinking the liquor would work folly in my simple brain, and so indeed I made it appear. Methinks if I

simulated tipsiness in a play-house the thing were not ill done. I told him I was no scholar, but judging by the wit God gave me he was right touching the writing, and saying off-hand like a drunken man the thing was downright silliness, thrust it into the fire before his face."

"I wonder you are alive to tell the tale," observed Montrose.

"Had he given way to the feeling of his heart I should be now as I would to Heaven he were," returned Rollock. "They say Argyle knows not the heat of fury. I have proved that a lie. He was as a ravening beast, a furnace of rage. But even while his wrath blazed I could see the gentle light of policy stealing into his face, and I was spared for other things."

"What other things, Rollock? Has he set you free to push his request for a treaty, so that I may deliver myself bound into his hands?"

"My lord," returned Rollock, with an agonising constriction of the throat, "it is worse than that. Can we be quite alone for the space of a minute?"

"Come to my tent," said Montrose. "Here," he added, as they entered, "we are free from over-curious eyes and ears. Speak on, Sir William."

"My lord," said Rollock, clucking like a man half-choked, "my first duty is confession. I have been playing the villain."

"I would not hear your enemy say so," rejoined Montrose. "Explain me the villainy."

"'Tis a very rank sort. I am a black traitor and liar, my lord."

"Mayhap 'tis not beyond forgiveness. You must make yourself sinless again."

"An' I were to burn for my sin yet will I stick to it," cried Rollock. "My lord, my lord, my poor veins are on fire with the shame of it. I am come to kill your lordship."

Montrose neither winked nor moved; the two men looked at each other a moment in silence.

"Wherefore you would have me alone," said the Marquis quietly. "That is fit and proper. Deeds

unseemly for human sight are best done in private. I mind me that when the Greek tragedians slew or maimed a man they did it behind the curtain, so as not to shock the general eye. Well, I have ever found that what Sir William Rollock undertakes he accomplishes. See, there is only this poor doublet between your steel and my heart."

"Oh, my lord," cried Rollock hoarsely and choked on the words.

"Be not troubled," said Montrose, smiling sadly. "In good truth, my friend, your coming and your purpose are both most timely. You little dream the kindness you have undertaken. Let this be an unpaid debt from Montrose to Rollock, the last and greatest of many. Nay, do not wonder that I talk so. Believe me it were rare gain to purchase ease from a vast pain at so easy a rate. A twinkling blade, a blow, a gasp mayhap, and peace. Is it not cheap? Argyle for once would befriend his old enemy Montrose. Strike then, my good Rollock, according to your promise."

Rollock threw himself on his knees, and looked up piteously at the face bent above him, a face strong and sweet even in that moment of tragedy. "My dear lord," he exclaimed, tears springing to eyes that had been dry for twenty years, "my dear, dear lord, think you then that Rollock could verily do this thing?"

"I scarce know what to think or believe," Montrose responded. "When a man is lost in a thick mist not only do his feet betray him but his ears also are deceived. Sounds come he knows not whence, the voices of his friends are strange. I am such a man. At present I know not which way to turn for truth, nor can I tell whether the falsity is in my hearing or in the speech of others. But rise, Sir William. It is not meet you should kneel to one so fallen from the loyalty of his friends. See, I give you a hand up; Montrose can still do so much."

Rollock dashed a rough knuckle into his swimming eyes and rose. "My lord," he said huskily, "when found you Rollock false? When you came hither out of England, riding on a sorry jade that clattered his

heels together for weakness, feeding on dew-berries, hiding as hide you might by dyke or thorn-bush——”

“A fine adventure, Will,” broke in Montrose, as if tasting over again the wild romance of it. “For all that’s come and gone I would not for a thousand merks have missed it.”

“Fine enough for the high heart,” returned Rollock. “And neither would I have missed it. Well, coming hither so, did Will Rollock take the safe and easy road? When that Scots trooper of Newcastle’s called out as if he would betray, insisting against all disguise that your lordship the groom was in very truth your lordship the Marquis, whose weapon was readiest for the event?”

“Thine, Rollock, thine,” answered Montrose warmly. “I would I could meet that trooper again, a rogue of much bravery and humour. ‘Do I not know my lord the Marquis of Montrose well enough?’ says he. Faith, a greeting to curdle the blood just then. ‘But go your way and God speed you.’ Providentially traitorous. I have indeed experienced most marvellous kindness, and from none more than from Sir William Rollock.”

“Yet, my lord, you would doubt him now when the danger is less,” said Rollock poignantly. “Hear my present tale and judge both it and me as you will. ’Tis simple truth, my lord, to say I burned to be with you. Night and day my one thought was how to accomplish that. Once I fought my way through a barrier of Campbells, a score to one. ’Twas in Huntly’s castle overby. But three score had to be fought outside and I was taken back.”

“My brave Rollock,” murmured Montrose, gazing at him fondly.

“Argyle thought me a traitor and a fool,” pursued Rollock. “Marking his conceit, I plied my poor wits in humouring him. He spoke of advantages if I threw in my lot with him. I was grateful for the privilege. He played the dispenser of favours, I the meek tool and dependent. At each move we drew closer together. Whiles my stomach revolted; whiles I could scarce help laughing in his face. But through all I played his

game, humbly and eagerly as any slave or sycophant. He handled me as he would. I was his instrument, his obedient puppet, dancing as it pleased his high mightiness to pipe. Was it his humour to put forth his hand? It was immediately licked by the cringing Rollock, a creature lost to honour, thinking of nothing but gain and good living. When words became too rude or plain, we conferred in nods and winks; we plotted with our eyes. When he looked *thus* I replied so. Ah! my good lord, what villainy may lie in a look. Oftentimes it is the levin flash that lights the villain to his mischief. Argyle has more knavery in one little eye than ten unchanged traitors in all their hearts. Yet I played to him as to the manner born. With jests and cruel laughter we planned deeds of treason and blood, over the bottle, 'twas ever over the bottle, as if the very fiend himself lurked in wine. Argyle filled the glass and spoke of swift rewards and heaped-up honours while I drank and smacked the lips. Then, finding me ripe, that soul of darkness took me to his bosom like a brother."

"And the mission, Rollock?" asked Montrose, with a twitch of amusement.

"Worse than the deed of Judas," was the answer.

"Judas," remarked Montrose quietly, "had his fore-ordained task to do."

"What means your lordship?" Rollock demanded, as if suddenly hurt.

"That Judas would have been Argyle's man," was the reply. "And that Rollock has now the chance of earning the fabulous price of Montrose's head, to say nothing of other promised rewards and honours."

"Think you so verily, my lord?" asked Rollock, a vivid anguish in his eyes.

"I think this," returned Montrose, with sudden emotion, "that although Judas betrayed his Master, taking the price of innocent blood, Rollock would tear his own heart out ere following the example. There is my hand on the belief. Rollock turned traitor, Rollock like a hired assassin taking Montrose aside to earn an assassin's wages? Fie, fie, 'tis unthinkable. Yet I

have this to tell you, that although Argyle failed to corrupt Rollock, he succeeded to the full with others. A little while ago I called for Sibbald, our old comrade in misfortune, Sibbald. He is gone."

"Sibbald gone?" said Rollock in consternation.

"Sibbald gone," repeated Montrose. "Sibbald, the man in whose loyalty I would have trusted even when I mistrusted my own. Yes, with prophetic eye Sibbald foresaw the crumbling of Montrose's fortune, and like a prudent man would save himself from the wreck. At this very moment I doubt not he is the honoured guest of Argyle; and Argyle, in all likelihood, comforts himself with the thought that Rollock's hand is red with Montrose's blood."

"The furies seize him for his treachery," cried Rollock fiercely. "The furies seize them both with all their interests, gear, and belongings."

"The furies were surpassing rich if they had but half their own," said Montrose. "Craigievar is off with Sibbald, broken his parole. Nat Gordon too is gone, though in him I spy a different intent. What other treason is afoot I know not. Ah! Rollock, Rollock, my heart aches and bleeds for the poor king."

"The king, God bless him!" returned Rollock fervently, "shall not lack friends though there were traitors enough to deck every bough of every tree in the forest. I took the liberty of telling his Majesty that if he would save his kingdom he had but to trust your lordship, adding to his trust such reasonable aid as a king would vouchsafe for sake of the public weal and his own crown. Then would the rebels speedily have their due portion and reward."

"You said well, it was indeed a liberty," Montrose returned, his face lighting humorously at the thought of privy councillor Rollock's blunt advice.

"My lord," was the response, "as your lordship has excellent reason to know, I am a plain man little versed in the courtier-art of flattery; but I have risked somewhat in the king's cause, and I hold it no more than fair recompense to be allowed to utter some tiny morsel of truth when the humour is on me. 'Tis not every

day a man of my trade finds himself so virtuously disposed. My lord, there is in court a something which ill agrees with my rude health. Not to go a mile round for the short path home, methought his Majesty nourished a legion of parasites somewhat too fondly in his bosom."

"He will suffer no harm," said Montrose. "You know, Rollock, there's a divinity doth hedge a king. Besides, what are we to judge his Majesty?"

"Why, and that is true enough," Rollock owned, with a twist of the countenance. "Majesty is majesty, and Sir William Rollock at your service, but a very common man with a simple heart for his Majesty's good. Yet it seemed to his poor eyes, unwilling witnesses as they were, that the king made overmuch of those whose business it is to live on his grace. Ah! my lord, I greatly fear me 'tis not all divinity that doth hedge a king. If you but saw the popinjays, the fantastical things of lace, ruffles, and French manners that swarm at Oxford! My lord, as an honest man I ask you, are perfumed fops and coxcombs the men for a kingdom in peril? If so, then must the Trojans have been all tailors, nine to the man. Ten thousand warlike prick-the-thumbs charging with their needles were as like to make another Marathon as yon valiant regiment of dancing-masters to beat the king's enemies. Why, my lord, they are fit only to furnish incense for his nose, or engage in the desperate enterprise of languishing and making eyes at the silken flutter of a petticoat."

"And why does Sir William Rollock tell me all this?" asked Montrose.

"Because like a penitent he would ease his soul," was the answer. "Also because he left Oxford with a very sick stomach. Moreover, he has this good and sufficient reason besides, that your lordship has the king's ear and might speak a word in season that would profit us all. For to deal painly with you, my lord, it appeared to me that the king's health would be mightily improved if his casements were thrown open to the unpolluted winds of heaven, which is to say,

my lord, that a word somewhat outside the bounds of flattery were at times wholesome fare for him. That is a plain man's mind on it. Why, look you, the blood of brave men spilled here in Scotland is but a jest for your Oxford foplings. I tell you, my lord, I could have spoiled the pretty looks of some of them with great zeal and joy."

"Sir William Rollock must not expect the impossible," said Montrose. "When did courts breed the Spartan virtues?"

"Never, that I heard of, my lord," Rollock replied. "From the hour when the beloved Absalom went forth privily to cut his father's throat to the day when King Charles—God defend him!—took Hamilton and Argyle to his heart, courts have been rankly poisonous. Pagh! there is too much purple slipper and civet box, too much whispering behind the arras, too much drooping of fawning eyes and bending of cringing backs when majesty is pleased to show itself."

"I warrant Sir William Rollock looked the king full in the face," said Montrose.

"May he be for ever confounded if he didn't," was the instant reply. "Moreover, 'twas his fancy the king was well pleased withal, as though he would have a man use his eyes according to God's purpose. It was on the point of my tongue to whisper his Majesty he should arm his cajolers and flatterers and the whole clan of soothsayers and send them forth to taste our Northland wind through doublets full of sword-holes. Jupiter Pluvius, what tears and tumbling of high noses were there! For the rest, I hope it is no treason to wish the king were better informed concerning the blood shed and the hardships endured for him. Methought at times he had but a dim understanding of them."

"A king must needs veil his knowledge," said Montrose, "and often pretend ignorance of that which lies at his heart. Such is the burden of royalty. A common man may speak as he will; a king has no such freedom."

"But surely, my lord," persisted Rollock, "he may

do as he ought with the hinderers and perverters of peace and happiness. Were I king to-morrow my first act of grace would be to hang a batch of courtiers, send another to the tower, and banish the remainder. That, you see, would encourage honesty. For what boots it for us to fight here while they revel yonder, making the king blind. All I pray is that Cromwell be not called in as physician."

But Montrose could not abide criticism of his sovereign, however truly or justly offered. Rollock's unsophisticated soldier eye had doubtless read a dangerous truth accurately. Nevertheless the king was king, and fealty the law for all his servants.

"The king," he said, "sees things which are hidden from our eyes, and therefore is able to observe a juster proportion. Has Sir William Rollock no flatterers who hope to profit by their craft? It is the order of nature that one thing lives upon another. The king, like lowlier folk, must abide what he cannot mend. For the rest be assured he trusts us, and let it be our business, my good Rollock, to see that he trust not in vain." The old magic of persuasion was in his voice, the old wooing smile on his face. Rollock was touched and conquered.

"My lord," he replied promptly, "may the lips be scorched that would impeach majesty. Set not a blithe canter of the tongue against a lifetime of deeds, poor it may be but honestly meant; in testimony whereof, as the beggarly lawyers say, here is still a right hand to strike for monarchy."

"There speaks Sir William Rollock himself," cried Montrose almost gleefully. "Well, the stoutest arm is needed and the stoutest heart to back it. There are many questions I would ask you, but they must be deferred. For I hear O'Cahan's voice in the imperative mood. There is a man who will delight you. Come, let us go forth."

A goodly company of gentlemen hung about the tent door, some sulky, some sheepish, one or two as it appeared drooping in actual shame; but all waiting with intense anxiety for the Marquis. They would have

been in on him but for O'Cahan's inhibition. His Excellency was not to be disturbed.

"What is it now, O'Cahan?" Montrose asked in a low voice. O'Cahan turned a red, angry face, made redder and angrier by the flare of torches and fir-wood fires.

"A convocation of cowards, my lord," was the muttered reply. Without comment Montrose stepped forward and bonnets were doffed.

"My lords and gentlemen, you would speak with me," he said, looking round. "Pray pardon me for keeping you waiting, but I had some important business with Sir William Rollock."

There was a momentary silence, as if none of them could find courage to speak. Then Lord Duplin, newly succeeded to the Earldom of Kinnoul, made himself spokesman. As Montrose knew, family matters called him home; otherwise he would not so much as dream of retiring at the present juncture. The Marquis nodded and looked for the next. And so, one after another, the Lowland gentlemen gave their reasons for asking permission to quit the field. Health was the main plea. Winter was on them, and they understood that instead of going into winter quarters his lordship meant to prosecute the war through frost and snow. Montrose listened with patient courtesy, nodding from time to time as his plans were mentioned, but through his courtesy it required no very keen eye to read his inward scorn as he heard the varied tale of inclement weather, broken constitutions, and home demands. When the last had spoken he turned to the Earl of Airlie, who stood a little apart with his two sons, Sir Thomas and Sir David Ogilvie.

"Does my lord of Airlie go too?" he asked.

"God forbid," was the curt, almost gruff reply.

"And Sir Thomas and Sir David?" inquired Montrose, with a gracious smile.

"The boys too remain," said Airlie, answering for them. "And I would, my lord, there were three hundred of us instead of three, and some of us younger."

"When I was in France," returned Montrose affably,

"I heard a thing from some stage play or other that sticks in my memory. '*Ses rides sur son front ont gravée ses exploits.*' 'Tis so with your lordship. Wrinkles are but the written records of great deeds greatly accomplished. As for these boys, why, my lord, what could they be save that which they are? the brave sons of a brave father." And bowing graciously he turned back to those who had made their petition for retirement.

"We shall miss you, my lords and gentlemen," he said as genially as if taking leave of endeared guests. "Be assured we will ardently look for your return. And now I will myself see that things are made ready for your departure."

When they left presently, shamefacedly and with many expressions of regret and respect, and also many promises to return soon, he watched them with a group of his officers. "There," he said, turning sharply as the tail of the procession disappeared. "There, you have the glorious handiwork of Argyle. 'Tis a triumph of craft that will make his heart glad. Well, we must try the plan of checkmate. O'Cahan, let the fires be lit and cavalry posted in the rear as if we expected an attack and were ready for it. Inchbrakie, get your men ready, we march forthwith."

"To Badenoch, as was arranged in council, my lord?" asked Inchbrakie.

"So that the enemy may be correctly informed of our movements?" returned Montrose. "No, no, Pate, we play not the goose to the fox just so easily. Our point is Balveny. Rollock, since Gordon is absent on leave you resume command of the cavalry. I will myself bide with you in the rear."

He had just mounted when a man brought him a letter which he said had been flung into their lines by some unknown person who immediately made off in the darkness. Montrose opened it hastily and read as follows:—

"Though I am absent yet believe me present. I go for your lordship kens what. Pray I come back cruse and canty with the bonnie muircock ye wot of. If

your spies forgather with me or my men, will they forbear to shoot.

“Your lordship’s respectful obedient servant,
“NAT GORDON.”

Montrose thrust the letter under his belt and rode after Rollock.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TRIUMPH OF GIDEON

IN a bleak wind which rose and fell with the eerie wail of the banshee Argyle's men stood to their arms, hands nervously tight on their weapons, ears pricked, eyes strained for what might at any moment leap out of the night. It is not a tranquillising experience to stand thus in quivering expectation of yelling furies and flashing weapons; and at the end of an hour's suspense the natural thing happened. A shot startled the leaguer, then quick as trigger could go another and another. In a moment, as it seemed, a sheet of flame lit up Argyle's front, displaying a line of ghastly faces. Officers bawled and struck at the men with the flats of their swords. Ardvoirlich rushed from Argyle's side in a white fury.

"Who fired that first shot?" he demanded ferociously. "Let him be turned out and have his grave dug before his eyes." The men shuddered, but would not betray a comrade. None knew whose the incontinent musket was. "God alive, are ye seeing ghosts?" cried Ardvoirlich hoarsely, "that ye waste ammunition on the mountain tops? They'll take no harm, ye doitering gomerils. Had Montrose's men been fifty feet in front of ye fient a one of them were hit. Now as sure's the sky's above us, the next one who fires without orders is a dead man." The men fell back shaking, to re-charge their pieces, and listen to the silence which might at any moment break into crackling volleys of musketry.

Some of those who held Argyle's pass, and were free to come and go at their pleasure, had come in earlier to pay their respects to his lordship. These were now

closely questioned. They assured their host that Montrose had but the remnants of an army and was as good as beaten. This was particularly the judgment of Sibbald.

"I suppose," said Argyle, looking at him shrewdly, "that if Colonel Sibbald thought not as he speaks he would scarce be with us now."

"Your lordship is a judge of human nature," was the reply which one could interpret as one pleased.

"You hear," said Argyle to his troops. "The man is at our mercy. Patience till daybreak and then upon him."

The cavalry crept out cautiously, lurking where the blackness was thickened by the shadow of the fires. Argyle paced before his tent door, stopping at every third step to hearken or question the assiduous Sibbald.

"A vain display, my lord," the deserter again assured his new patron. "It was ever Montrose's weakness to parade the high stomach."

"And pride goes before a fall, does it not?" said Argyle, with one of his feline smiles.

"Holy Writ says it, my lord," was the unctuous reply.

Argyle resumed his walk, his fancy taking a new but not unfamiliar turn. On the strength of Sibbald's words it once again became busy with that long-delayed despatch to Edinburgh, announcing that the rebels were at last completely destroyed. He mused elatedly. Ay, that would indeed be a despatch. He could see all those grim faces of the council lighting up with the holy joy of vengeance accomplished—by his hand. Ambition flapped its wings and crowed. After the vengeance the rewards and honours! He could almost feel the crown pressing on his brows.

With these thoughts flashing and thrilling through his mind he pulled up, facing the foe. What were his cavalry about? And as if in answer to his unspoken question all at once out of the dead blackness a trumpet rang, its note coming down on the wind shrill and piercing. Next minute there came a great shouting,

followed immediately by the noise of furious galloping. Argyle listened with all his sense in his ears. Had the Campbell horsemen seen their chance and charged home like the lions they were? He had his answer a minute later when they returned, panting and wild-eyed, to say they had been set on without warning by a legion of mounted fiends.

Montrose had been reinforced, none knew how or whence, and his new allies were worse than the old. They must have been in hiding when Sibbald and the others left, and—perfidy of perfidies—they were led by none other than Sir William Rollock. In a sudden upshooting of flame more than one trooper saw him plainly, slashing like a Samson, his face the incarnation of diabolical fury and glee. Why had his lordship not shot the man? Was he not vile from the first?

Though Argyle changed colour a little at the news of Rollock's defection, his manner might seem to the unobservant the perfection of ease and composure. In an even, almost indifferent, voice he ordered his saddled horse to be brought to him, and gazed serenely at the bale-fires, swirling and leaping in smoke wreaths as the wind eddied. He mounted presently, pretending that the altitude of horse-back gave him a better outlook. "They may be upon us any minute. If attacked we are to fight, and if need be die where we stand," he gave out; and looked anxiously for a way of escape. "You die fighting, dear friends, you the common dross meant for the pit. My life is precious; wherefore I will preserve it whole against another occasion," that was ever the brave tenor of his actions. Some of the Lowland men thought with envy of Montrose's followers. They had a leader, whatever else they might lack. Even a Campbell here and there muttered wrath and disdain into his beard, as he waited and watched. Argyle was ever on the point of hurling his javelin, and always for some inscrutable reason withholding his hand.

Chilled to the marrow by more than cold, he dismounted and emptied a beaker, like a man very sick at heart. That brought the semblance of a glow to his shifty eyes, restored the semblance of valour to his

manner. The cavalry went out again, while the foot held breath over jumping hearts. An awesome silence fell on the listening force. Afar they could hear the enemy calling joyously to one another; but where were the cavalry? They answered by and by in a way which gave Argyle fair excuse for anger. He cursed aloud, blamed his troop leaders, blamed fate, blamed the darkness, blamed everything and every one, and kept close to his saddled horse. The wind brought to his fearful yet greedy ears the noise of a mighty tumult in his rival's camp, a tumult of triumph and exultation, as was too plain.

"Yes," he said bitterly, "it must be true the enemy has been reinforced. I have been horribly misinformed. There are still villains who steal to Montrose under cover of night. This kingdom of Scotland is rotten at the core, rotten, I say rotten. Why, sir, does not your office prompt you to aught concerning the eternal fate of rebels?"

The wind was now charged with sleet, keen, stinging sleet, that drove level into the eyes, froze the blood, numbed the hands, so that they could scarcely hold a weapon. The owls set up a dismal hooting, a dog whined bodefully, heaven and earth were full of portents. Yet in the thick, miserable darkness what could a waiting army do?

Argyle entered his tent, saying that as the enemy would not come on he meant to rest an hour, and was immediately forth again, pacing with groom and saddled horse. Not for crocks full of gold would he have lost sight of that charger. The men shivered, brushed the sleet out of their eyes, and stamped their feet for warmth. A horse whinnied, and was answered from the distance. Argyle turned and faced the blackness impotently. "I would give a thousand merks to know how many there are of ye," he said, as if communing with himself. "But it seems there's none to find out for me."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a score of volunteers begged leave to go, but Argyle made a sign of irritation and disapproval. "I cannot afford

to lose my men on fool's errands," he said witheringly. "Keep to your posts."

He paced with quickened step, chin in breast, only stopping at intervals to hearken. The sleet thickened, the wind rose souging and moaning like a company of lost spirits, but still Argyle tramped and still the half-blinded, half-frozen camp watched in silence. Thus the night wore on. In the sleety mirk of dawn Argyle once more sent his cavalry out, and lo ! an unspeakable surprise. The partially-quenched fires were still there, smouldering black and red, or scattering their ashes on the gale ; but of Montrose's army not a trace. It had vanished like a morning mist. Where was that furious body of cavalry ? where that mighty host of foot that made a noise as of grey old ocean trampling wildly on the strand ?

Argyle needed no interpretation of the puzzle. There were no reinforcements, no extra cavalry, no mighty host of foot. It had all been a trick. He was almost green with disgust, yet his first words were wholly complacent. "Ah !" he said, like a man hearing precisely what he expects. "Off again. Dear me, will they never stand ?"

In the same hour Montrose's little force drew breath at Balveny, weary, draggled, forespent, yet most inconsistently jubilant.

"That was indeed a stroke, my lord," O'Cahan remarked, shaking out his sodden bonnet. "I did not think it possible."

"My good O'Cahan," responded Montrose, "if you and I had always stopped at the strictly and plausibly possible, where were we now ?"

"Dead men, belike, my lord," said O'Cahan cheerfully. "Faith, 'tis a rare game this of cheating the simple and getting out of the jaws of death. I fear me our men have but lean sides after the race."

"See that the gallant fellows have food, then," returned Montrose. "Rollock, you seem merry ; pray what is the jest ?"

"I was thinking, my lord," answered Rollock, "of the fine appetite Argyle will have for breakfast this

morning. His horsemen could in very truth have eaten us."

"Well for Sir William Rollock he is not Argyle's guest to-day," laughed Montrose. "Yet would he greet you in great gladness of spirit were you to return."

"With the wolf's grace over the lamb, my lord," said Rollock. "Yet might Will Rollock cheat him even there."

"'Tis not unlikely," Montrose owned in a tone of admiration. "I offer you my compliments on the feat of last night. I profess to you there were times when I verily thought Sir William Rollock must be at the head of a thousand horsemen at the smallest reckoning; and as for the foot," glancing at O'Cahan, Inchbrakie, and Struan, "why speak to me no more of an army that is terrible with shouting and with banners."

"The trick was indeed prettily enough done," observed O'Cahan gaily. "I would I could see Argyle's face when he discovered it."

Montrose had in fact extricated himself from the very maw of the wolf, and done it while the wolf quaked in terror.

CHAPTER XXV

SNOW-DRIFT

THE Lowlanders evinced a shrewd discretion in the time of their departure. Nothing but invincible loyalty and constitutions impervious to hunger and hardship could bear the ordeal that was to come, and Heaven had apparently not vouchsafed them either. The piercing drizzle, the driving hail, the smothering snow-drift, the bare freezing hill-side, the sting of the blast, the forced march in the teeth of the howling elements, these things are for the rude clansmen, not for such as have a civilised love for the fireside, the soft couch, and the well-spread table.

Two days Montrose lay quietly at Balveny, watching the hill-tops whiten, and then made his swift wild way where Lowland feet would certainly have bled and faltered in following—to the corries and bens of Badenoch. The commander who would keep his army in heart must also keep it active. The very celerity of Montrose's movements begot enthusiasm, as a rush through the air kindles and quickens the blood. Argyle heard of him at Balveny, turning like a stag to toss his head in contempt, and then like a stag vanishing from the ken.

In chagrin and disgust the Covenanting General again visited Strathbogie with the extremity of his wrath in revenge for his own failure, and covered a deep mortification with the air and port of a conqueror. Had he not told them that the rebels would not stand, and behold was he not right? It seemed they must hunt and hunt, and and hunt yet again. Pagh! what was the use of hunting a brock that took to earth

at every little flurry of fear instead of coming into the open for some honest sport? You would have thought Archibald Campbell the most daring captain in Christendom.

The burning and plundering done to his content (Huntly being still sulkily hiding), he sent messengers to Edinburgh with glad tidings that Montrose was a broken fugitive, folded his tents, and, like a brave man whose task is done, turned him homeward to taste the sweets of peace and reap the harvest of honours.

On the Spey, when about to call on the Grants and the Frasers anent old discourtesies, Montrose got word of his rival's doings, and instant as a hawk wheeled southward to prove how wise had been the Lowland gentlemen in leaving him to his madness.

In the black night and a tempest of snow and wind, which made the deer turn tail in the corries and the eagle rock in his eyrie, he struck into the heart of the Grampians. The rawest commander could have seen his foolishness and sapiently prophesied disaster. Nor would the judgment have lacked the most excellent reasoning. The storm held the mountain fastnesses in a riot of snowdrift. Blinded and choking, the force wrestled its way through gorges of concentrated wrath, across moors where the whirlwinds gather for sport, waded rivers and burns, tripped headlong over crags, sank waist-deep in sloughs and bog-holes, sprawled among peat-hags. They ought to have broken their necks, been drowned, dragged to destruction by the sucking mire, buried under the whirling snow wreaths. Yet no man grumbled or gave sign that he was doing aught else than enjoying the very desire of his heart.

The horses had to be led, and sometimes dragged bodily out of slimy pits. "Do not pull the poor beastie's tail off," one man would call to another through the storm. "He may need it for the flies yet." "'Tis thick the flies are now," would come the cheery response. "Man, it's the fine outing we're having, as Donald of the glen said to his cat."

They surprised a crouching herd of deer, slew ac-

cording to need, and supped, seated royally on cushions of snow, to the music of the blast. "That's the piping for ye, Neil, my lad," cried a Strathtay man, poking an Athole piper in the ribs with a deer-shank. "Puts your chanter to shame." "A bonnie tune," owned Neil, "though maybe a wee thought monotonous on the high note, and as for warblers it's go seek them, as the old wife said to her cow about carrots and supper."

So, light-heartedly feasting and fighting they went, floundering, merrily recovering, calling cheerily to each other when touch was lost. "Where are ye now?" an officer would bawl, his hands at his mouth. "Faith, sir, trying to get out of a bog-hole," would come the answer, or it might be, "Trying a somersault over this rock," or "Diving after a troot in the burn, sir." Montrose himself was ever in the midst, catching at every jest, flinging it lightly back, tripping, falling, rising and shaking himself, laughing all the while like the merriest youngster among them. But his eye was everywhere, and there were moments when he asked himself doubtingly if they were to get out alive?

Twenty-four miles through storm-possessed fastness, through bog and rock, by precipice and ravine they sped, grey spectres, scarcely able to see each other in the swirling scud. Modern engineering has made a highway and a railway along part of their track. But for path they had the uncharted wild, without ray from moon or star to light them on. Luckily they were mountaineers, hunters of the hills, bred to the tempest and able to pick their way like goats, or if need be to lie down cosily in their plaids with the snow for pillow, and sleep sweetly. For such things, too, Montrose was born, and it appeared the same was true of the Ogilvies, father and sons. The greatest wonder of all was the grey-haired Earl of Airlie. For all his hoary head there was not a younger man among them nor one who took the adventure with a livelier sense of frolic. "Ah, my lord," he would say, "'tis enough to make an old man a boy again," and once when his son seemed to falter, "Davie, Davie, what ails ye, man, that ye slip like a lassie?"

In the driving greyness of dawn they drew near Struan. Montrose asked if the Robertsons desired to turn aside for the greeting of wives and bairns, but to his joy and the Tutor's they replied in chorus, "We go with our chief and your lordship." At Blair Athole the same question brought the same answer. "What," said young Murray to Tullibardine, his eyes red and blinking from the pelting snow, "would you have the Murrays outdone by the Robertsons? Your lordship is jesting." Such, too, was the tune of the Stewarts of Athole and Strathtay. So the force swept on, many of them within sight of their own chimneys and gable-ends, past Blair Castle, the headquarters of the Royalists, with a flourish of trumpets to announce the passing of friends, down through the pass of Killiecrankie, deathlessly associated with the glory of a later Graham. When they reached Faskally woods the storm was giving over as though in despair of daunting the dauntless. At Pitlochrie the sun peered over the south-eastern hills, as if to see whether they were still alive.

"See," Montrose cried, "the sun greets us," and could scarcely forbear a salute with the tumpets. He looked round on a glittering world, peaceful now and meek and innocent in its spotless white. He looked at his men; they could tell another tale than that of innocence, and indeed their torn, tossed and draggled looks suggested they had been through the hands of the furies. But one thing they preserved whole and undiminished, their inveterate cheerfulness. Not without pride he viewed them. Between sunset and sunrise of that bitter winter night he had led them across the Grampians, without loss of man or beast, a feat for a Hannibal.

Partly as a *feu de joie*, partly to get rid of damp charges they fired their muskets. The terrified people peered from their huts, expecting Argyle's raiders, of whom they had had more than one experience. When the poor folk discovered it was Montrose himself who was thus saluting the morning they came out with a kind of piteous joy, entreating him to be their guest.

That, he told them politely, was out of the question, but he gladly accepted food for his men. One trembling dame, whose son stood in the ranks and would not leave them even to embrace his mother, would have carried off the Marquis by force. "Come in by to the bit fire," she pleaded. Your lordship is just like a drookit hen."

"Which sun and wind will soon warm and dry," he answered blithely, and gave the word to march.

Down by the banks of the Tummel they went, growing ever keener and keener, like hunters drawing near their game. For their purpose was to surprise Argyle at Dunkeld, where he lay in comfort with his foot. Thus was Montrose a fugitive; thus were the rebels scattered and broken.

According to the Highland proverb, it is hard to catch a sleeping fox. Argyle, having quick ears for the tread of a foe, suddenly discovered that he had urgent business in Perth, where was a strong garrison of Covenanters. In the emergency his men were to do—as their needs or their wits might devise.

What they did was to turn out of their snug winter quarters in great confusion and a storm of profane language. There was no fight, because they were leaderless, and had the rocks and woods of Dunsinane and Dunkeld for hiding-place. Montrose halted his men on the braes of Tullymet, where they could see the black waters of the Tummel rush boiling into the Tay. Here were many of their own kith and kin, and every face was friendly. Moreover, some of the chiefs who had made the march were now at home. Montrose dined with Stewart of Dalguise, supped with Stewart of Grandtully. After his fierce race he would gladly have prolonged his stay to enjoy my lady's hospitality, but that he was summoned to Athole by an event for which he prayed when his need was the sorest.

He mounted and rode immediately, Stewart riding with him; and at the end of four hours they galloped into the court of Blair Castle, where Inchbrakie and O'Cahan had already arrived.

CHAPTER XXVI

COLKITTO'S RECRUITS

EARLY in October, as we have seen, Montrose sent Colkitto on an urgent expedition to the west. Alastair was to relieve the Castles of Mingarry and Langhaline, taken and garrisoned soon after his first landing at Ardnamurchan; but his main business was to recruit the loyal clans who still hesitated, and bring them to the Royal Standard, by forced march if possible. "Take till mid November," Montrose told him. "We will keep Argyle in play till then, and it ought to give you time enough."

"Surely, my lord, surely," answered Colkitto readily, and went his way with a great air of promptness and vigour.

Promptness and vigour he never lacked, though they were not always exercised in the direct line of duty and obedience. No sooner was he out of his chief's sight than Alastair began to think of business of his own which might very fitly and conveniently be worked into the larger scheme entrusted to him. Montrose, fretting in Strathbogie, heard rumours of his gay pranks among the Campbells, whom he chased to and fro by door-cheek and gable-end in a grim frolic of hide-and-seek which was death to all who were caught. Nightly conflagrations and the richest of fare heartened his men. It was a jest with him that the blaze of a Campbell homestead made the best of fires for the roasting of a Campbell ox.

You are to bear in mind there had always been a deadly feud between the Macdonalds and the Campbells of Argyle, in which the Macdonalds did most

of the fighting and the Campbells got most of the gain. By craft and subtlety, plus a relentless cruelty, Argyle possessed himself of lands, revenues and powers which by no right or title were his. He was the great octopus of the west, crushing and appropriating wherever his arms could reach. Thus stripping and driving forth without justice or remorse he had won for himself an implacable hatred from many clans, but the deadliest hate of all was the hate of the Macdonalds.

At a halt in the mountains Colkitto brought the old bitter wrongs to the minds of his men. In words that were as a fan to a smouldering fire, he bade them recall the past with all its crimes of oppression, murder, and ejection. Why were they treading their own hills as aliens and strangers? Why were they forced to seek refuge in the glens of Antrim? Why, but because Gillespie Gruamach, curse his squinting face, was a thief, a murderer, and a usurper?

"He has taken your lands and your gear," cried Alastair in fierce eloquence, "turned your wives and your little ones out to die on the wintry hill-side, driven you forth like despised cattle. He has made exiles of ye, exiles," he repeated, dwelling with extraordinary ferocity on the word. "Exiles, you whose forbears owned the land when the Campbells were gillies and drovers, you who have older and redder blood in ye, ay, the very least among ye, than all the might of all the greasy Campbells could ever show. My lads, see to it that our hand is felt and our wrongs revenged."

Well he knew what note to strike. If any incentive were needed, that little speech gave it. Remind a Gael of unjust exile, of robbery, usurpation and high red blood, and you have him in a flame on the instant. Colkitto had but to lead his men to see them work his will with a thoroughness which even he could not wish to be bettered.

Argyle heard of their doings with a shaking heart and a sense of utter helplessness. It was not merely Montrose who troubled him. Every night he had visions of devastating fires in Lorn, and could almost feel the foundations of Inverary Castle shake.

But they would misjudge him who thought that Colkitto's sole aim was revenge, sweet though it was to his soul. He had a very nice and precise understanding of his countrymen, and no scruple in turning the knowledge to account. Little as it might appear at the first glimpse, there was a deep, astute policy in lighting his path by blazing roofs. For he knew that the devastating of Argyle would bring a quick joy to many a scattered clan that had suffered at the arch-usurper's hands—Macleans, Macgregors, Macnabs, and others, bursting with hate and rage, but too weak to make reprisals for themselves. He had no need to be told that the best invitation to the clans he wanted was the sight of avenging fires and swords dripping blood. Wherefore he came to them as it were with the proof of red hands. Would they share the vengeance and the spoil? that was his cunning question. Now was the time to avenge heaped-up wrongs, and take back part at least of what had been stolen. You will perceive that Alastair was master of more arts than the mere rude art of fighting.

With a nice judgment, he first paid his respects to his kinsman, John Macdonald of Moidart, captain of Clanranald. "What bring you, Alastair?" says Moidart, going out a little dubiously to meet him.

"The best of news for a Macdonald heart," answered Alastair, and told his tale.

Moidart called his men together and made a great banquet in Alastair's honour. Then the two, with pipes playing and clansmen gaily arrayed, took a turn by the Braes of Lochaber, calling by the way on Donald Glas Macdonnell of Keppoch. Moidart, having himself caught fire, in turn set fire to Keppoch. "Great tidings," Moidart told his brother chief. "Alastair, here has been up and down the land of Lorn doing the thing he would, and ye ken what that is. Buckle on, man! buckle on! we are up and off to Athole to join the Marquis himself. After that, by the grace of God and our own swords, it's supping at Inverary Castle we'll be, with the king's banner flying on its battlements."

"Say you so, say you so?" cried Keppoch, in a joyous bustle. "Be making yourself at home here, Moidart, and you, Alastair, till I get the lads ready. Tuts, it's a great day altogether. How is my lord the Marquis, Alastair? I heard a whisper of your progress in Lorn. 'Blazing, blazing!' that was the sweet word. Och, I tell you it does a man's heart good. To-night you will just be lying at Keppoch; I think we'll be scraping up meat and drink enough for all the brave lads. To-morrow morning I'm with you."

With Moidart and Keppoch at his back, Colkitto had but to beckon to others to see them come trooping—Stewarts of Appin, men of Knoidart and Glengarry, Glenevis, the clan Ian from Glencoe, Camerons from beyond Lochy—pretty fighters all of them. With these at his heels he marched proudly back to Athole, reaching Blair Castle almost in the same hour as Inchbrakie and O'Cahan.

Judge of Montrose's joy when he again set eyes on his Major-General in the midst of this brave array of chieftains and clansmen. One by one in order of precedence Macdonald presented the chiefs, with a little flourish of pride as a modest indication of his own share in this glorious issue of his expedition. Though innocent of court arts, and indeed holding them in contempt, his native shrewdness got him through a delicate duty with adroitness and success.

"Ye ken him well, my lord," he would remark, with a sly look of intelligence at Montrose, when his knowledge of the exact nature of some great man's fame ran short, as though to say, "No need to sound his praises; are they not known to the whole wide world?" And the man introduced swelled pleasurably on the implied compliment.

Well, too, Montrose knew that, while an equal graciousness and cordiality were due to all, the gradations of rank must nevertheless be ceremoniously marked and observed. For Moidart was not as Knoidart, nor Keppoch as Glenevis, neither were the Stewarts as the Camerons, nor the Camerons as the clan Ian. Each chief had his own peculiar title to honour, and the

loyalty both of himself and his followers depended upon its proper recognition. Add that individual foibles must be discerned and humoured if harmony was to be secured, and you will see that the fighting of battles was the least of Montrose's tasks.

Civilities and introductions over, Montrose immediately held a council of war, thinking it best to take them in the flush of enthusiasm. The first question was that of immediate procedure. In view of the hardships of a winter campaign, Montrose was himself for passing a month or two in some snug nook of the lowlands; but at that proposal the new arrivals threw up their chins.

"Was it for this, then, you brought us hither, Alastair," the captain of Clanranald demanded, "to winter among weavers and other base mechanic persons of the south? To the West, my lord, to the West, if ye heed my advice!" "to the West" meaning, of course, the shire of Argyle.

"Ay, ay," chimed in Keppoch, "the West is surely the place to winter in. Is it not so?" he asked, looking round the other chiefs, and the response was a chorus of assent.

"I thank you for your counsel, my friends," Montrose returned politely. "And gladly do I avail myself of your better knowledge. But tell me how you think we are to find food and lodging in mid-winter for such an army as this within the territory of Argyle? We must not live on our friends."

"No need, my lord," answered Ian of Glencoe. "Let the enemy be at the cost of keeping us."

"'Tis a soldier's advice," said Montrose. "But pray tell me by what means we are to persuade the enemy to that desirable course."

"My lord," was the reply, "when a Glencoe man enters the country of Macailein Mohr his plan is just to help himself, and so by that trick of nature, as you would say, he contrives to live not so ill at all. We have here a man who will prove to your Excellency that Argyle is a land where the cream is fine and thick on the milk and the honey as good as you'll find in a

week's march, whilk is to say, my lord, that the feeding for man and beast is such as keeps the heart content and covers the ribs bonnily. Call Angus Macailen Dubh," he said to one of his men, "and let him tell his lordship what he kens of his own seeing."

The testimony of Angus Macailen Dubh was clear and emphatic enough. "There is not," he assured Montrose, "a farm or half a farm under Macailein Mohr but what I know every foot of it, and if good water, tight houses, and fat cows will do for you there is plenty to be had."

"Hear you that, my lord?" cried John of Moidart. "It were a grievous sin and folly to let the good things spoil. Moreover, consider this, my lord, is not our business to call in at Inverary since the Campbell, in his exceeding great modesty, will not receive us anywhere else? Let us have a look at the spider in his net."

"Friends," said Montrose, addressing the general company, "you hear the chief of Clanranald. What is your judgment?"

"That we make that call at Inverary of which Moidart speaks," replied Ian of Glencoe promptly. "Here's Angus Macailen Dubh to show us the road; and for the rest of it here are our swords and dirks," a statement which evoked a shout of approval.

On such occasions it was Colkitto's humour to stand aloof as if disdaining to mingle his voice with the crowd's, and in truth no chief among them was more punctilious on the point of rights and privileges than the Major-General. "Alastair," said Montrose, turning to him now with a deferential air, "you have but returned from viewing this western Canaan. What say you?"

"That your lordship were well advised in imitating Joshua," was the reply. "It may be Inverary would prove no harder to win than Jericho."

"Westward let it be, then," said Montrose.

"When do we march, my lord?" asked Colkitto, eager as ever for action, particularly against the Campbells. It took much pillaging to glut his appetite there.

"The quicker the better," answered Montrose. "Yet see to it first that the gallant fellows who came hither with you have proper rest and refection."

"And the course, my lord," inquired Colkitto, still urgent and practical. "Give me leave to remind your lordship that we promised to call on our good friend Alastair Menzies of Weem—we owe him a debt or two. In duty bound we must also give Balloch a call in the passing. There will be sore disappointment if we keep not these engagements. From Balloch 'tis but a step to Loch Tay, and then there's all Breadalbane and Glenurchy before us, a fine fat country, my lord. Then the Macnabs are west by at Dochart, and our friend Alan must by this time have got his Covenanting cattle safe home. Besides all that we could pick up the Gregarach as we go. They are a broken clan, my lord, but for our purposes none the worse for that."

"The reasoning is conclusive," said Montrose, smiling. "Let it be done as you advise."

CHAPTER XXVII

TO THE WEST

WITH the bounding ardour of men pursuing the desire of their hearts they crossed the hills south-westward by the old Loch Tummel route, passing on the last height about the Lyon valley the graves of a company of Atholemen, treacherously butchered by Gillespie Gruamach in his famous expedition to the "bonnie house of Airlie." The old Earl marked the rude mounds with a hardening face, and some of the fiercer spirits among the Murrays and Robertsons turned aside to renew their oaths of vengeance above their dead comrades. But in truth there was little need for any fresh incentive, every member of the force being from the first impatient to get to grips with the slippery Argyle.

The number was encouraging, being now nearly three thousand, the pick of the clans under their own chiefs. Clanranald alone led five hundred men, Kep-poch not many less, and the other western chiefs in goodly proportion. Inchbrakie and Struan had likewise added to their strength. As for Colkitto's Irish, they were compact, elated, and purposeful. In a word, Montrose had never been in such force; and rarely in such heart.

One thing only he regretted, that the king could not witness the fine swing of these stalwarts with his own eyes. The sight might hearten him amid the thickening troubles in England, where the Roundheads were daily growing in audacity, and alas! in power, Could three thousand clansmen, Montrose asked himself, turn the scale and save a crown? Could they rout

half a dozen armies, frustrate Baillie, Leslie, and that portentous giant, Oliver Cromwell? The task was tremendous, but were there not high hearts and stout arms to balance the odds?

They descended the steep slope from Tomphubil (*Anglicé*, mound of the people, otherwise Atholemen's graves) at a trot, such was their ardour, keeping by the wizard stream of St. Aidan's, the Keltney Burn of the latter-day guide book and picturesque tourist, by Garth Castle, whilom citadel of that fierce Stewart who won for himself the title of the Wolf of Badenoch, to the Ford of Comrie on the Lyon, where they halted to confer. The Ford of Comrie (now the spick and span, unromantic, iron-girdered Comrie bridge) lay quietly then and for more than two centuries afterwards, in the thick of fir-woods between two openings, one westward to Fortingal and Glen Lyon, one eastward to Appin of Weem, the country of Menzies.

Across the water was Drummond Hill and immediately behind that the Castle of Balloch, a pestilent nest of Campbells. Hard by above the river bank, Comrie Castle lifted its gaunt and battered front from a perch of rock, grimly telling of old feuds and forgotten sieges. It had been the Menzies stronghold until the Menzies chiefs moved eastward to their later castle. Looking up at it, Colkitto reminded Montrose afresh of the discourtesies of the Laird of Weem and the engagement concerning him.

"With your lordship's permission," he said, "I will visit him, while you and the other gentlemen inspect the Castle of Balloch overby here. He is a poisonous wasp, my lord. Let me take his sting out so that it irk honest men no more."

"That were indeed well done," put in Clanranald. "And while Alastair is so engaged, if it please your Excellency we can be discussing matters with Balloch, if he will but have the goodness to wait for us."

"Etiquette sweetens friendship," responded Montrose pleasantly. "We certainly owe the Menzies of Weem an exchange of compliments, and there could

be no fitter ambassador than the king's Major-General. Therefore, Alastair, you will observe the due rights and ceremonies. Only you will not delay, for we will await at Balloch the happy issue of your adventure. And now let the rest of us be wading."

"I will see your lordship's commands faithfully executed," said Colkitto, with an air of deference not at all unusual in him when he got his own way. "I am thinking the Menzies need not detain us long."

Before he went, both Struan and young Murray of Tullibardine spoke a private word in his ear concerning the ferocity of the Weem men in Argyle's harryings of Athole.

"Rest content, gentlemen," Colkitto answered, with his grimmest smile. "I will be your attorney. These Appin thieves shall pay to the uttermost." And he was as good as his word.

Not many of the clan Menzies slept in their beds on the night of his visit. He would have had the laird himself for prize, but that the man, with a swift understanding of Colkitto's ways, took to the woods and rocks above his castle. There among the foxes and polecats he witnessed the pillage he could not prevent. For Colkitto, who did nothing faint-heartedly or by halves, stripped his castle, made a bonfire of his corn-stacks, drove off his cattle, not a Menzies daring to show face in protest. In this way a good many Athole beasts were recovered, and the scales of justice again set swinging evenly.

Meantime, to Montrose at Balloch came the muses of comedy and tragedy hand in hand, the lighter sister tripping and pranking a step in advance. It was at daybreak on the second day of his stay (Balloch having forgone the gratification of waiting for him) that a sudden riot of noise arose outside his quarters. Hurrying forth to inquire the cause, he was greeted by a great roar of laughter, through which broke a shrieking voice as it might be a fury at her chosen business.

"Ah! there he comes, there comes his lordship himself," some one called at sight of him, and next

moment Alan Macnab was before him, doffing the bonnet in a bubbling exuberance of merriment.

"I give your lordship greeting," he cried airily. "Here we are all of us back again, ay, and some more foreby too, some more foreby, my lord."

"You are thrice welcome, Macnab," responded Montrose, on the poise between wonder and gladness. "But you come strangely attended. What have we here?"

"We have here, my lord," answered Macnab, with a comical grimace, "a most cordial friend and well-wisher of your lordship, one who would fain pay her respects to your lordship's face. Bring her up, my lads," he called. "Bring her up. Do not be hiding so sweet a thing at the back there."

Thereupon from the rear a shaggy mountain pony or sheltie was partly led, partly pushed by a score of boisterous men, and on its back, writhing, gesticulating, fuming and impotent, was Elspeth of the Eye—considerably the worse for recent adventures, if one were to judge by her torn, bedraggled appearance.

"I present to your lordship a lady I think ye have met before," said Macnab, bowing with the utmost gravity. As a trapped eagle screeches at its captor, so Elspeth exploded in her rage. Though her utterance was choked and incoherent, she was understood to say that Alan Macnab would live to rue the hour he molested her. Montrose listened in a kind of puckered horror, not because he was affected by the maledictions, but because he was shocked by the spectacle. He turned to the grinning Macnab with a face of perplexity.

"What jest is this?" he demanded with some sharpness.

"Blithely will I explain to your lordship," Macnab replied with alacrity. "Last night, as it were for my own ends and pleasure, I took a turn east by to Aberfaldie with my men. And that minds me of something else. Any of the friends on a visit to Appin overby, my lord?"

"Yes," Montrose replied. "Macdonald and the Antrim men are there."

"I was just thinking that now," remarked Macnab. "Well enough I kenned by the bonnie fires that Samson's foxes were having the fine ploy among the Philistine's corn. He, he."

"Alastair likes to light his way for himself as he goes," said Montrose.

"Troth, and it's a plan I can most heartily recommend to your lordship," rejoined Alan, who thought with some others that Montrose was inclined to laxity in the matter of burnings. "A bittie flame now and again is grand physic for rogues and thieves. Fire's your best purifier, my lord."

"True, true," assented Montrose, not without impatience. "But touching this wretched woman."

"Touching this wretched woman," repeated Macnab, with a chuckle, looking at the dishevelled Medusa-like figure on the pony, "touching this wretched woman, as ye say, I will inform your lordship precisely in the following order. Last night, about the rising of the moon, 'twixt darkness and light as ye would say, I was with my men a little on this side of Aberfaldie, thinking no evil to any man but just enjoying the sight of Alastair's bonfires on Appin side, when it pleased Elspeth here to come out spitting on her thumbs, and at me worse than a fishwife."

"Words break no bones," observed Montrose quietly.

"If they did, my lord, there wouldn't be a whole bone in my body this minute," returned Macnab. "But tuts, what do I care for an old wife's clash? It just played bluff on me. But I submit to your lordship it is entirely different when the name of the king's general is taken in vain."

"Was she honouring me, then?" asked Montrose.

"I am not sure you would just call it by the name of honouring," Macnab replied. "That old wife," and he pointed to Elspeth, "for as wrunkled as she is, and for as old as old and done as she looks, has more of Beelzebub in her than you could think fitting in one of her age."

"Is it me ye are miscalling?" broke in Elspeth on her highest note. "But go on, go on, the black raven

will feed on your heart, Alan Macnab, for what you have done this night, ay, and on the hearts of them that are with you."

"A pretty humour and a kind, is it not, my lord?" commented Macnab. "Last night she just used up all the curses that ever were invented. If a body was afraid of things it would make his hair stand straight up on his head just to hear her. 'I have blasted others,' that was her best word, my lord. 'I have blasted others, and I will blast you too, ay, and him that sent ye,' meaning thereby, your lordship, 'till he wishes he had never been born.' 'It would be another tune, I'm thinking, if he was here,' says I. 'It would be precisely the same tune,' says she. 'Oh, that I had my eyes on him this minute to work the wish of my heart.' 'By my faith, then,' says I, 'tis the happiest meeting heart could wish. Come along with me.' With that we whipped her up, and to make a long story short, my lord, there she is."

"To blast me," said Montrose, smiling. "Had she not better dismount for the rite?" Macnab burst into a satirical guffaw.

"That's a kittle business, as the stork said to the fox about eating through the neck of a bottle. Has your lordship marked what a grand belly-band her shanks make for the beastie? Faith, and it was no child's play getting her on. She has hawk's claws, my lord, hawk's claws. Look at that," and he exhibited a pair of scratched hands.

"We have all the instinct of self-defence," said Montrose. "Let her be taken off. Her present posture befits neither her age nor her sex."

Elsbeth was docile enough while they assisted her to dismount; but no sooner had her feet touched earth, than she swung about with the fury of the pythoness in her mien, and faced Montrose.

"You said this minute they brought me to blast you," she screamed at him. "Even James Graham speaks the truth at times. They did, they did, and glad I am of it, glad, do you hear? as one who sees his hated enemy dead at his foot. It pleased Alan Macnab to

make a jest of it. Elspeth will have her jest too, ha, ha, and this is the way of it, James Graham—may the devouring blight fall on you and all that is yours. I have said it before and I say it again, may you be cursed in your going and your coming, in every thought and act, and let every victory you gain be but a step to your swift black doom.”

She seemed to dilate before their eyes with prophetic rage. The coarse merriment, which Montrose could not stop, died away in a kind of shuddering awe. The host that had crowded for sport stood motionless as if cast in bronze. Then it shivered as if a wind from eerie regions of ice and death all at once blew upon its vitals. Many of the men there knew Elspeth and the meaning of her uncanny visions, and some of them were angry with Macnab for his foolish joke. In truth, Macnab was himself regretting his bravado.

“Where is Balloch that I may speak with him?” Elspeth demanded, looking round with a kind of contempt on the force of armed men.

“He is not receiving his friends to-day,” Montrose answered gently.

“Not receiving his friends,” she repeated. “Not receiving his friends, ay, and how long will James Graham receive his?”

“As long as it may please Heaven to grant him the ability,” was the calm response. “And now, as there is much to do, I think we must be bidding each other farewell. But first do me the favour to accept this,” as he handed her a gold piece. She took it, held it a moment in her open palm, and then looked at the giver.

“So James Graham would buy off Elspeth’s curse with gold,” she cried. “That is how I take his gift,” and she flung it to the ground, cracking her thumbs in disdain. He stooped to pick it up, meaning to restore it, but she had turned and was striding off. “Give it to her,” he said quietly, handing the coin to a man. As it was thrust fearfully into her hand, she paused, looking at it with a new expression.

“Why not?” she said, as if replying to her own

objections. "Why not?" And then wheeling quickly as a hawk, she fixed her eyes on the Marquis.

"They say the evil one is not so black as he's called," she said. "Let Elspeth take him as she finds him, and this is what she has to say. As ye have neither mocked me nor thought it bravery to be rude with an old woman like some ye ken of, I take your gift and would give one in return. Will ye hear a word of goodwill from Elspeth?"

She looked at him very hard, her black, falcon eyes seeming to pierce to the core of his being; he looked back at her kindly, pityingly, and with an eye at least as steady as her own. A full half-minute the strangely contrasted pair stood at the gaze, the force beholding them in wonderment.

"Right gladly," he told her, "will I hear any word you have to say."

"Then, my lord, take this from Elspeth—turn you about. The Red Reaper has reaped enough; let him put up his scythe and hie him away home."

A little smile played on his features, but he immediately became grave again. In a flash his mind went back to old time oracles and the women of the ancient mysteries. Was it possible, could it be that this poor begrimed creature knew what was hidden from him?

"Why should he turn him about and go home, mistress?" he asked simply. The answer made some of the hearers very cold.

"Because the raven flaps its wings and croaks for blood, the blood of stark dead men. My lord, will ye turn about and go home?"

"You must be spent and weary," was the unexpected answer. "If you deign to have some refection in Balloch Castle as the guest of James Graham, I will tell you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEWITCHMENT AND WARNING

HE conducted her into the castle with as fine a courtesy as if she were the first lady in the land and he her sworn cavalier. Macnab stared after them in a kind of awed bewilderment, and there were others scarcely less amazed than he.

"Saw you ever the match of it, my lord?" John of Moidart remarked to the Earl of Airlie, when the Marquis was out of earshot. "Troking with Campbell witches, is it not a new and strange employ for the king's officers?"

"Forget not the example of Balaam," returned the Earl smilingly. "Were it not a feather in his excellency's cap to turn cursing to blessing?"

"I know not what to make of it," rejoined Moidart, his countenance a knot of perplexity, an uncanny feeling at his vitals.

"I make this of it," put in Keppoch, "that 'tis ill trafficking with the crafts of the Evil One. You speak of the king's officers charming witches; what if witches charm the king's officers to their undoing? I do not know what made Alan Macnab go and bring her here at all."

"We will soon put you out of the dark there, Keppoch," retorted Macnab curtly. His spirit had come back, and he was not the man to endure censure tamely. "I will tell you plump and plain why she came here. First because it was Alan Macnab's pleasure to bring her, and next, because if some folk had not the queerest notion of politeness she would this minute be getting

a little of her deserts instead of being feasted and flattered like my fine lady."

"Like the fellow in the play," said the Earl, eager to appease the irate Macnab, "you would make it tit for tat, which is to say that as fast as she answered with frowning looks you would sauce her with bitter words."

"Words!" repeated Macnab scornfully. "Words are for them who are afraid of deeds. If she was west by in Glendochart it's more than words she would be having to think over. But it seems things are upside down and inside out, and that the new road to grace and favour is cursing and flyting at them you would win. And look you, the plan prospers. Yes, it prospers; that's the morsel that sticks in the gullet and makes old-fashioned folks like myself gape. But in truth, my lord, as you may have found out, the longer ye live the more ye see, and the older ye get the less ye are likely to wonder at the things that happen."

"Tut, you rail at good omens," returned Airlie playfully. "If Ulysses takes a turn with Circe, why you may be sure he knows what he is about."

"Circe here, Circe there," rejoined Macnab. "I am not of them that think that the devil is to be won by stroking. For myself, I mistrust him at all times, but particularly much when he smiles. Elspeth or any of her kin or clan friends with us. Expect that, my lord, when the Campbells turn honest men and restore the gear they have taken by thievery. But hark you, is not yon Alastair's pipes I hear? He was for giving her the silver penny from the musket mouth at Aberfaldie. I wonder how he'll like to see her feasting with the Marquis of Montrose in Balloch Castle."

The Marquis, too, heard the sound of Colkitto's pipers, brave music heralding a conqueror, and hastened forth to greet him. Alastair was in his grimmest good humour. With a good conscience he reported that he left the Menzies country in a blaze, that Weem had taken to the rocks like a hunted fox, and that the spoil, including much cattle, was coming up behind.

"I promised to be your attorney," he said, glancing

at Struan and Murray. "Send and ask the Menzies body, if you like, how I kept my word. And now, my lord, what of Balloch?"

"He left his castle, as you see," was the answer. "As for himself, we had not the happiness to set eyes on him."

"And that is something of a pity," said Colkitto, "because he is just the man we would like to meet for a crack about some of his bygone deeds. But it's likely he'll not be above taking a lesson from the ashes of his castle. Set the torch to it, my lord, and let us be going."

But Montrose, as usual, deprecated that trenchant method of teaching good manners. Colkitto affected an infinite surprise. "Why, my lord," he cried, "if you want to be rid of a wasp's byke is there a surer way than by burning it? Leave things as you found them, and you'll hardly be out of sight when Balloch is back crowing like a muircock in the dawn and laughing at the soft hearts of the king's officers. Believe, my lord, kindness is no cure for his complaint. Ho, ho," he broke off, spying Elspeth as she stepped from the castle door in manifest satisfaction of mind and body. "Ho, ho, what have we here?"

"A poor old woman, by all appearance," replied Montrose quietly, and turned from his Major-General to speak a word with her. Every eye was on Macdonald to mark how he took this singular aberration, and then in a nameless fascination passed on to the Marquis. He was smiling amiably upon Elspeth, and she, without sign or touch of her usual malignity, was cooing back at him like some egregious turtle.

"Whose is the shelty she came hither on?" he asked Macnab.

"Indeed, then, my lord, I never fashed to find out," Macnab replied, with a tilt of the head. "A beast, you may be sure, that some Menzies or Campbell thief took from its rightful owner and for that reason to be taken back again."

Montrose ordered it to be brought to him, and that done, restored it, with apologies, to Elspeth.

"And maybe," he told her, "you'll change your mind and say a bit prayer for James Graham after all."

"My lord," she responded, looking him closely in the face, "will ye be heeding what I told ye?"

"Be sure I will," he replied.

"Not about the victory alone," she said, and some could scarcely believe it was the voice of the wicked witch-wife they heard. "My lord, I came here ye ken how and got ye ken what. For sake of that I speak the word that may be I should not speak. If ye must go on mind yon, for eh! my lord, I would be loath to hear——" She looked round suddenly as if afraid of being overheard, and then, drawing a step nearer, whispered something, as it appeared, with intense earnestness. "That's the thing ye see," she said aloud. "And, my lord, will ye turn about?"

"We must all dree our weird," he answered, smiling a little sadly. "The Fates are not to be cheated by any turning back; rather are they to be won by a bold front."

"You think that," she said, gazing at him as in pity. "Well, Elspeth has spoken, and what must be must be. But it's sore to think of it, my lord, sore to think of it. And so young too, ay, ay, so young and so brave."

"In what's to come, if come it must, you'll not forget this day," he said, with the same grave courtesy he had shown from the first.

"Never fear that, my lord," she returned, almost like a mother dealing with a headstrong son. "Never fear that. But or we meet again, dearie, dearie me, what there will be to remember."

The pony was saddled from Balloch's stable and Elspeth went off, the whole force watching. The chieftains looked at each other. What would come of this bewitchment? And as they wondered Montrose turned serenely to Colkitto.

"Let the trumpets sound," he said. "We march forthwith."

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW A CASTLE WAS TAKEN

THE trumpets pealed, but not for immediate marching.

"This is the country of Breadalbane, my lord, the entrance to the Campbell lands," John of Moidart took leave to remind the Marquis. "If the men are the men this is the place for them to begin."

The Royalist General was never allowed to forget that other plans and purposes than his were included in the general design. If the clans aided him for monarchy he must aid them in feeding local and private grudges. Charles was a most excellent gentleman and king, but he dwelt at a great distance, whereas the hated Campbells were close at hand to be harried and despoiled.

Colkitto sniffed at Moidart's words. "If you will just run over by and ask our most loving friend Menzies of Weem, it's in my mind he'll be telling you we have begun already," he remarked.

"And a very good beginning too, Alastair," Moidart owned at once, "only Weem is but a petty fellow by the barons of Breadalbane and Glenorchy, a mere branch, a little twig that flourishes or falls as happens to the tree. My lord," turning back to Montrose, "how can ye better win at the heart than by slashing off the arms and legs? In my poor way of thinking it is ever easier to pull down the citadel when the outer works are disposed of. Trample Breadalbane and Glenorchy under your feet and you have an open road to Argyle."

Montrose could not refute the reasoning, perhaps

would not if he could. After all, his mission was not peace but war. And better a short, sharp dose than long doctoring.

"You speak well, Moidart," he returned. "Our Major-General has already said as much for duty. Alastair, when the lads are ready let us march, and you might whisper them to be quick."

When the lads had helped themselves the order to march was blithely enough obeyed. Leaving Balloch Castle empty as a barn in June, the force spread itself, a fiery drag-net on both sides of Loch Tay, taking all that fell to it. Few beasts worth driving remained in its track, scarcely any gear that could be carried, and not many roofs to shelter the pillaged. The Breadalbane Campbells, men, women and children, fled to the mountains and caverns, a prudent if not very heroic course; for thus they preserved their lives, which would otherwise have been worth little in spite of Montrose's humanity.

In Glendochart, a little west of the modern village of Killin, Macnab was in the midst of his own clan and showed it by a princely port and strut. In the engrossing pursuit of revenge he had forgotten or forgiven the reproof (so construed) of Montrose's extraordinary civility to Elspeth. The king's General and three thousand men to take it out of all enemies, here indeed was a gale of good fortune to fly the Macnab pennon on.

"I know every foot of the way, my lord," he told the Marquis in reply to some expression of doubt concerning the route. "And it's the nearest way to Inverary I am taking you;" the nearest way being precisely the course which for private and personal reasons Macnab desired to take.

At Loch Dochart, a little before the dawn, he brought them to a pass at which Montrose halted in misgiving. His scouts reported, and Macnab owned, that the path through the defile was but a jagged shelf or ledge zig-ragging along the face of a cliff with no outlet above or below.

"Why," exclaimed Montrose, not altogether in

pleasure, "does Macnab think we are goats that he expects us to scramble along the face of rocks? Besides, we expose ourselves. Two hundred stout fellows would hold us there and destroy us at their leisure."

"Faith, and I think half the number would suffice," was Colkitto's judgment. "To have us floating like dead sheep in Loch Dochart were too much joy for the buzzards of Argyle."

"Ay," said Macnab, a peculiar twinkle in his eye, "as your lordship justly observes, two hundred stout fellows might destroy us before breakfast, or it may be Alastair's reckoning of half as many would do it. And forby there's a castle half-way along on a bit of an island, within pistol shot of the passage-way."

"Garrisoned?" asked Montrose.

"Truly garrisoned," answered Macnab, "full of Argyle's men."

"Then," said Montrose, not without irritation, "it would be madness to attempt the passage. Let us find another way."

"Will your lordship be pleased to leave this small affair to me?" asked Macnab, swelling on the request. "Tuts, is it turning back we'd be at the thought of a score or two of Campbell trash?"

As they stood in this plight of uncertainty the blear December sun peeped over mountains of snow as though to reveal their danger the more clearly. Montrose was displeased almost to anger. An army might go into that pass never to come out again, save as dead men. Below Loch Dochart lapped and curled in foam against the barrier of stone as in a gurgling impatience for its prey; above was the unscalable cliff, and in the midst of the way a garrison, doubtless on the watch.

"And if we leave it to you, how long are we to await the issue of your adventure?" Montrose asked.

"If ye see him not in an hour," was the answer, "then ye may know that Alan Macnab will not be coming back."

"On then, on," said Montrose, "only I hope you will not keep us too long in suspense. The morning is

dreigh enough without the chill of doubt. Make haste, Macnab, as you love us."

"Not a minute will be lost," returned Macnab promptly.

With that he selected a score of his trustiest men and, bidding Montrose keep an alert watch, moved forward with an extremity of caution which showed how perilous or how important to his own mind was the enterprise. The company passed round an angle in the cliff which hid them; a deep silence followed, then to the astonishment of those that remained the defile rang with a desperate shouting.

"Failed so soon?" remarked Montrose to his Major-General.

"I scarce believe that Alan Macnab would give tongue to his failure so openly and loudly," Colkitto responded. "Hark you, I profess he's calling to the garrison. Does he think, the arrant fool, that armed men will surrender a castle because he is pleased to yell at them? We are undone if we look not to ourselves."

But Colkitto misjudged Alan. "Ho there, sleepy heads," Macnab was bawling at the pitch of his lusty lungs. "Ho there, a fine tale this will be of keeping the great man waiting."

"Who is it that calls?" some one responded from the castle.

"By rubbing your eyes well you'll maybe find out," Macnab retorted scornfully. "Have ye ever heard of Alan Macnab of Eilan Rowan and Kinnel nearby?"

"As pestilent a knave as breathes within a hundred miles," was the response.

"It's paying compliments ye are, my bonnie man," commented Macnab. "It'll be news to ye that the pestilent knave stands here with the most urgent letters from the Lord Marquis of Argyle, and that if he's kept warming his toes in the snow there's them at Inverary overby who'll have something to say to it."

"Letters from the Marquis of Argyle?" repeated the voice from the castle in evident amazement.

"Even so," quoth Alan. "And as I tell ye he is

somewhat in a hurry about the matter. As to whether you will obey him or believe me you'll just be pleasing yourselves."

There was a pause, and then the voice from the castle called again: "How are we to know this is true?"

"Faith, and that's not for me to say," was the cool reply. "But it's in my mind there are two easy ways of finding out; first, by just biding where ye are and refusing us a boat; second, by sending a boat so that we can deliver our letters."

There was a long pause, followed, without further speech, by the rattle of a chain and the splash of oars. "They're coming," Macnab whispered to his men. "Now mind every man of you what I've told ye. If it's to be blood on the dirk, let it be blood on the dirk. Quick and home with it, is the word."

The boat came alongside, a goodly sized craft with two rowers, and immediatly a dozen Macnabs threw themselves in, chanting a snatch of an old Gaelic song.

"It's merry ye are, on such a morning," said one of the rowers, eyeing them doubtfully.

"Light hearts make blithe voices," returned Macnab pleasantly. "We've made our peace, man, we've made our peace; tired of feuds and fighting, that's the word for it. My lord the Marquis is pleased to honour us; and that minds me, he's mighty anxious to have us back, so pull, my lads, pull."

On the steps of the landing they were met by a messenger to receive the letters and carry them to the commander. Two yards behind him, by an iron door giving access to the interior, stood a brace of sentries with muskets at the guard.

"The Marquis charged me straitly to let no hands but my own deliver the letters," said Macnab, with a winning air of truth and innocency, and slipped past the messenger. "What is this?" he demanded next moment as the sentries stopped him. "Here I come fast and hard, with these lads to bear me company, expressly from the Marquis, and you stop me. Now I will turn about and go back if ye like, but as to the letters, no hand but mine will deliver them."

"We have our orders, sir, and must obey them," replied one of the sentries sheepishly.

"Why and that is true, my lad," Macnab owned affably. "You are good and true soldiers, ay good and true. Let me think how I can keep my promise to the Marquis and yet bring no blame on you."

With that he turned half-way around and lifted his hand to his chin as if considering. Quick as the glance from his eye his men leaped on the guards, stifling and disarming them. The messenger, attempting an alarm, went head foremost into the loch. In the same moment Macnab himself, with such of his band as were not occupied with the sentries, drawing sword and dirk dashed through the open door and up a tortuous stone stair lighted by spluttering candles. A hot and busy ten minutes ensued; then Macnab looked over the battlements and spoke to his men below. In ten minutes more he was with Montrose.

"Well within the hour," said the Marquis, welcoming him.

"It has always been Macnab's way to be as good as his word," was the response. "And I have now the honour to report that the castle and all within it are at your lordship's disposal."

"Captured?" said Montrose, lifting his eyebrows.

"That's about the way of it," Macnab answered complacently.

"This is indeed a most excellent service," cried the Marquis, making no attempt to hide his pleasure. "Accept my thanks and congratulations." And again, when the force was safely past the castle and out of the defile: "Macnab, I am more your debtor than I can well express. This is indeed a service of which his Majesty must know."

"Your lordship is pleased to magnify a trifle," returned Macnab, bursting with importance under an air of indifference. "Still and all I'd like to see Archibald Campbell's face when he hears of the little ruse."

CHAPTER XXX

A FRIEND IN NEED

To Argyle, lying in fancied security at his castle of Inverary after a chilly visit to the Estates in Edinburgh, came one evening wild-eyed shepherds from the hills with the intelligence that the enemy were coming and would be at his gates immediately. He stared a moment without winking, and then pronounced the thing a lie. Did they understand that invasion was impossible, inasmuch as there were passes guarding him which no hostile force could make its way through in summer, much less when they were blocked with winter snows ?

"Panic has turned your heads," he told the affrighted shepherds, well knowing from personal experience the effects of unnerving fear. "But a few weeks ago Montrose was at Dunkeld, a broken and discredited man, and you tell me now he is reaching at the gates of Inverary. It cannot be. I heard indeed that some of his thieves and runagates were at their banditti work in Breadalbane and Glenurchy, an impudence for which I daresay Balloch and his people will contrive to exact ample payment. But an army penetrating to Inverary, no, no. It's a far cry to Lochow, my lads, a far cry to Lochow."

"Your lordship knows best," replied the men. "But we speak the sore, sure truth. The sky is red with fire, and the snow redder with blood, even as we tell you."

"We will see to it," said Argyle, drawing his brows together and losing somewhat of his colour ; "we will see to it," and dismissed the doleful newsmen.

With his chosen counsellors, when the invasion

could no longer be denied, he affected anger. There was treason, he declared. "I will have some folk hanged at the market cross for this," he cried. "What force has Montrose with him, can you tell me that?"

The terrified imaginations, one stimulating another, gave him portentous figures. And further intelligence from without confirmed them. In the dusk the shepherds arrived crying out their news, and by midnight the whole countryside was in flight. Thicker and faster the frantic groups poured into Inverary, each with a direr tale and a more harrowing terror than the other. Never before was the tribute of fear paid with such unstinted generosity, such absolute spontaneous honesty. "Montrose, Montrose," the wild cry ran, and the rest was delirium.

At the first word of the enemy's approach Argyle sat cannily busy over fresh plots and plans of immense ambition. An elect few of his friends were closeted with him, among them James Stewart of Ardvoirlich, now in constant attendance and assiduous as a man's own shadow. The Campbell chief had just issued a summons for a general muster of the clans he controlled, with promises of vengeance and spoil added. Highlands and Lowlands were to act together, and clan Diarmid, with the chief himself at its head, was to take the van in seeking and crushing James Graham and his outlawed vermin. A man fancying he sits snugly impregnable in the midst of his own easily gets an overweening conceit of himself. In his castle of Inverary Archibald Campbell was a great warrior—till the trumpets of the foe were heard.

James Stewart took a turn among the panic-stricken fugitives and came back with a dreary word. "The town is overrun, my lord," he told his patron. "The wretches are clamouring for succour and can scarce be kept out of the castle. Will your lordship speak a word to them? The sight of you would assure them. They are like to jump out of their skins with fright."

"Poor wretches, I will go to them then," said Argyle, rising, but immediately he rued the resolution and fell back into his chair. "No," he added, "they must

show more courage. Good God! Is this a time for parading oneself like a mock prince? Honeyed words will not turn aside the enemy's spears."

"Then what are we to do?" Ardvoirlich asked bluntly.

Argyle rose, looking hard at the other. He had suddenly grown calm and was evidently considering, "James, a word with you," he said all at once as though a new thought had shot through his mind. "Do me the favour to step in by here where we can be alone," with which he led the way to his private cabinet.

Fifteen minutes later Ardvoirlich was out again with an air of extreme mystery and importance. Looking neither to right nor left, nor speaking a word to any one, he passed quickly into the outer darkness. It was already near the dawn. The night had been a weltering frenzy, a tumult of wailing and unheeded cries for help. For the invaders were momentarily expected; and there was no hope of mercy.

The invaders, however, were in no haste to strike, and indeed Montrose was giving time to get the women, the children, the aged and the infirm deported to a place of safety. Besides, it was better that the clan should have a chance to rally.

Going forth into the night, Ardvoirlich looked cautiously about for some minutes and then, finding he was not observed, slipped down to the quay where lay the fishing fleet. Many of the boats had been seized by the frenzied people and were now heaving and dancing among the waves outside. But some remained (owing to the resistance of the owners), and by the light of a lanthorn Ardvoirlich chose a smack which might be trusted in rough waters.

"I need it," he told the owner curtly.

"I'm a poor man, sir," the fellow whined. "She is all the riches I have."

"For pay, you gowk, for pay," rejoined Ardvoirlich. "Think you Macailein has thieves for guests, that you treat me like a robber? Good pay for good service; that's the word of it."

"I did not know you were one of Macailein's gentlemen," said the man, with a servile obeisance.

"You're gleg at jumping to conclusions," retorted Ardvoirlich. "Who said I was one of Macailein's gentlemen?"

"If I'm wrong forgive me, sir," pleaded the man. "For it's God's truth, my poor wits are all through-hither this night. For threescore years I have lived in this same town of Inverary and never did my eyes see the sights of to-night. Will it be the killing for us all, think you?"

"My good fellow," was the reply, "know you how to guide a boat?"

"Saw you ever Loch Fyne in an anger, sir?" the man asked in return. "I've been on it at its worst, and I'm not at the bottom yet."

"You're the very man, I can see," said Ardvoirlich briskly. "There's just one thing more. To your skill with a boat can you add a silent tongue, even when the eyes stare in wonder? Ach, there's more harm done by the little loose tongue than by a thousand rogues with dirks and claymores. In these merry times, my good friend, fools see more than wise men durst utter. Do you take me?"

"Indeed, then, I can maybe make my teeth as tight a bar on my tongue as any of my neighbours," was the astute reply. "But what will the duinuasal be wanting?"

"Four little things," answered Ardvoirlich, turning the lanthorn on the man's face—"a cool head, a skilled hand, a leal heart and the silence of the grave."

"Ochone, and is it to be dead men then?" said the other in alarm.

"That is as may be," Ardvoirlich replied. "You'll not be for managing her alone," he added, turning to the boat. "Know you any one as skilled as yourself?"

"My son Hamish is as clever a fellow as ever pushed a boat out on Loch Fyne, if his own father should say it," the boatman replied.

"And able like his own father to hold his tongue?" asked Ardvoirlich.

"If it's worth while," was the shrewd reply, "I'm thinking Hamish can be wise."

"It's the truth, I have lighted on the very two men," said Ardvoirlich drily. "I've heard it said that gold makes the best of kitchen. Here's a piece, just an earnest of what's to come if you do my business well and handily."

"You have not told me what it is, sir," said the man, fingering the gold lovingly.

"It's a way I have," was the response. "Find Hamish, and get the boat ready. Expect me back in fifteen minutes."

"Will it be alone, sir?"

"Them that have patience learn. And let me whisper as something just between ourselves that in the dark a little over by here there's a man on watch to see to the keeping of this bargain. I said fifteen minutes; it may be only ten."

With that he turned away, going straight to Argyle, who awaited him in a growing tremor.

"All is ready, James?" he asked anxiously. He had changed his dress in the meantime and seemed to be prepared for a journey.

"Quite ready, my lord," Ardvoirlich assured him. "I've engaged a stout fellow, well skilled in boats and willing to take risks in the way your lordship kens of. His son goes with him, and the pair of them are like death in keeping a secret." He stopped abruptly, looking closely into the face of his patron.

"Macaillein," says he in a queer voice, "will ye not be for staying with your people after all?"

"You know it is of the utmost consequence that I go," replied Argyle uneasily, adding immediately as it were in a spasm, "You think me a coward, James?"

"I would be loath to take any such liberty with your lordship," Ardvoirlich returned, reassuming his ordinary manner. "Tut, what was I thinking of? Any fool is good enough to be shot at, or cloven in two with the claymore. Your lordship is right as always. Come, let us hasten."

"A moment, James, a moment," said Argyle,

drawing a quick breath. "Does any one know of this?"

"Not a living soul but our two selves," replied Ardvoirlich.

"The people will wonder," said Argyle musingly.

"They're good at that, anyway," observed Ardvoirlich. "Blessed be the giver of wit, some of us can tell a story to suit an occasion. Ah! 'tis a great thing; invention. Draw your cloak closer about you, my lord, the wind is shrewd, and there be eyes about. There, there, I profess your mother would not ken you."

And with that he led the way down a private staircase, Argyle following as obediently as a child. As the fugitive stepped on board, his face hidden in the folds of his great coat, the first shiver of grey came into the sky.

CHAPTER XXXI

FEEDING FAT SOME ANCIENT GRUDGES

THE home instinct kept the boatmen tacking back and forth with an eye on the place behind. Silent as Charon they were, and almost as grim, till all of a sudden the younger gave a cry of horror. A thick swirl of smoke rose against the sky in the rear; the enemy had kindled the morning fires in Inverary.

Argyle looked up inquiringly, rose like a sick man, gazed rearward a full minute with the face of the doomed and sank back abjectly into his seat, shuddering as he wrapped his cloak tighter about him. The water lapped drearily at the boat sides. The sea-fowl screamed drearily in their circling flight above, but in his agony of fear and shame Archibald Campbell heard neither.

In the fascination of the events behind the men let the boat drift. Then a second time Argyle was startled by a cry. "Oh! the curse be on them, the curse be on them," the old man screeched, shaking an impotent fist at the mounting flames. Again Argyle looked back, to see the red fire flaring in the heart of the black smoke. And the fuel for that fire were the roofs of Inverary, his own Inverary, the Inverary he had thought safe from attack.

"Hamish," the old man yelled, "about with her, we'll go back."

Argyle twitched as at the touch of the knife point. "You're paid for going on," he said, with forced calmness.

"Paid," repeated the old man, "paid for running away when the rafters of my home are blazing. About with her, Hamish; about with her. Paid for running

away ! I tell ye I'll sail into the middle of yon fire. Hamish, do you hear me ? About with her."

A new light came into Argyle's eyes. For a moment he looked keenly at the distracted boatman, and then with perfect coolness, as it appeared, whipped a pistol from under his cloak.

"It seems I am losing authority even among my own people," he said. "But if my word is not enough there's here that'll maybe enforce it. The moment you put about this will speak to you. Have the goodness to set her nose for Roseneath, as my friend Ardvoirlich told ye. I've an engagement there, most pressing and necessary to be kept." He was again master of himself and of the boatman as well.

"Oh ! my lord, my lord," the old fellow wailed, cowed and penitent, "what are we but the servants of Macailein, as our fathers were before us ? What am I to lift my word against your lordship's ?—but, but, it tears the heart to think what's going on under yon coping of smoke."

Argyle, with some ostentation, put away his pistol. "God alive, man," he cried then, looking hard at the shivering boatman, "think you my heart is not torn by the sight of it ? If you would fain be yonder looking after your bairns, and bits of plenishing, what of me with the care of a whole people on my head ? Galled, do ye say ? The flames scorch me where I sit, man, ay, they burn me far past the bone. You speak of your service to the house of Argyle ; has Argyle no service for his people ? But what would be the use of being back yonder now ? As ye ken, the clansmen are not in ; if they were, Lord, wouldn't I lead them to the avenging of this day's work ! But mark you, there's a time coming, ay, there's a time coming, and it's near at hand. That's why I'm hurrying now. May the beasts get drunk and wallow like the swine they are till I come back. So make you haste—Rory Mac Iain Mohr, is it not ?"

"The same, your lordship, the same," answered Rory, with a tug at his dripping forelock.

"And this is your son, Hamish," smiled Argyle.

"I have heard of him, oh, yes, I've heard of him—a likely lad; a very likely lad. Well, well, when all is settled and quiet again you'll just be coming up to the castle and see Macailein. He likes to have his friends about him. You know the way of my House, Rory."

"A king's way and a prince's," returned Rory with alacrity. "I ask your lordship's pardon, but the sight of yon burning. Ach! it is like an Atholeman's blow, hard to thole. Hamish, let her have the wind. It's going for help your lordship will be?"

"For help, surely," replied Argyle. "And the quicker we go the quicker we'll be back with the red coats to work our will."

"A little more on her, Hamish," cried the boatman. "There, there, you son of a born idiot, not too much. Light as a lintie, my lord, light as a lintie. She's taking her way now; hear the swish of her. Easy, Hamish, easy. Is it capsizing his lordship ye'd be?"

She keeled over so that Argyle had to grip the sides to keep his seat. His cloak fell back, and for the first time he sat revealed, a man of drawn and ghastly face. Partly to hide it, partly to know the worst that was happening he turned once more and looked back. The column of smoke had grown in size and density, or rather many columns were now commingled. The upleaping tongues of flame seemed to bend derisively towards him from out of the very heart and marrow of Inverary.

"She'll take a wee breadth more, Hamish," said Rory, thinking of speed and the professional pride of the boatman. "Ay, so, so, keep her at that."

The wind took the sail full, and the little craft skimmed the water like a thing animate and eager. Argyle still sat looking back, till an intervening headland shut out the sight of his burning town.

Thus was that boast of the far cry to Lochow turned to foolishness and mockery. Colkitto led the attack and did not dally. But fierce as he was, others were yet fiercer than he; for the western clans gave Irish and Atholemen alike a lesson in the red art of vengeance.

"To it, my lads, to it," Moidart shouted to his men.

"The day of reckoning has come at last. Ye ken what debts are to pay," Glengarry added his stimulating voice. "This is Inverary," he reminded his followers. "At it, at it, let the Campbells have a tale to tell of this day's work." But of them all the most gleefully furious was Alan Macnab. Drunk you might have called him; drunk in truth he was, with the drunkenness of the sword. Many were the dreams he had dreamed of slashing off Campbell heads, and setting the torch to Campbell roofs, but his wildest vision fell short of the intoxicating reality. "Tell me," he would cry, panting, as he took a tighter grip of his dripping claymore, "is not this the fine town of Inverary? Is the Marquis at home till we give him good-day? Ho, Macailein, ho! out with your thieves till honest men get at them."

Once at a street corner he spied Ardvoirlich, crimson and sweating, in the midst of a mob he was making some attempt to rally and direct. Like a mower, Macnab cut his way in, shouting "Kilpont," and "Collace." Ardvoirlich turned, casting on him the scowl of Satan. "Wait, Hamish," cried Macnab, "it's glad I am to see ye, man; bide but two minutes and you'll be keeping company with my lord Kilpont."

"Back with ye, back," Ardvoirlich roared at his men hoarsely. "They are too many for us." And the mob broke, Ardvoirlich himself flying fastest of all.

"I'll have the son of a pig yet," cried Alan. "After them, my lads, after them, last foot foremost and home with the swords. Ach, but it's the grand sport. Another for Macailein, ho, ro."

"Let his possessions suffer for it," roared Alastair. "Let him have ashes when he finds heart to come back."

So King Campbell's capital, or what of it would burn, went up in smoke and fire to heaven. In his heart Montrose pitied the poor wretches whose dwellings were thus laid in ashes (when princes and other big folk fall out it is ever the people who suffer); but this stern piece of retribution, he hoped, would hasten the time of peace.

With rare discrimination Colkitto saved the taverns while their contents lasted, and likewise some houses in the better quarters of the town that promised loot or lodging or both. In the actual work of destruction Montrose himself took no part. Seeing that the fox had bolted he withdrew a short distance outside the town, content to leave affairs to his Major-General, who managed them to the admiration of the clansmen. When the grim work was done they marched out, noisy and red-eyed, laden with booty and gleaming with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW THE HARE PURSUED THE HOUND

WHILE the army caroused, dancing, with whoops of joy, on the embers of Campbell households, the General, keeping vigil with Inchbrakie and Struan, was busy with plans. The council of war was therefore but another concession to the touchy chiefs on whose aid the success of his enterprise depended. To an hour's hot debate, in which every man who had a right to an opinion expressed it with the look of a Cæsar, he listened patiently, appearing to weigh the smallest suggestion as if it were a great reason of state. When the debate ended, by tact, good humour, and unfaltering purpose he had his own way, with the ready and even clamorous assent of the debaters. A dash northward among the mountains to visit the Frasers and other northern Covenanters, that was the approved plan. But before a start could be made he had once again to see his force melting like snow in an April sun. For as many bands as there were clans represented must go off to their glens with cattle and other spoil of war. The Irish alone, as usual, had no part in this home-taking, and Macdonald was full of wrath.

"Drovers," he commented savagely. "Always drovers. Do we fight, then, that one glen may fill its byres with the cattle of another?"

"Let them be, Alastair," Montrose whispered him. "Let them be; they go on the clear promise of returning to us at the first need."

"'Tis ticklish work whistling back the hawks once they are out with their prey," replied Alastair. Then he turned to the drovers. "Since needs must, bundle

and go, my lads," he told them imperiously, "bundle and go. Here's a whole army waiting to give ye the go off, and in a desperate hurry to be marching itself. Come, horn and hoof out of this with ye." He smote a dilatory heifer so that it went down groaning, an intimation that he was in no mood for trifling.

Before the cattle were out of sight he had the army briskly on the move. "The quick step and ever the hind foot foremost," he told the men; and so it was. With long strides and few stops they went by the head of Loch Awe, under the white peak of Ben Cruachan to Loch Etive, round the knuckle of Appin, sharp eastward through Glencoe, north and west again by Loch Treig and Loch Lochy, taking Lochaber by the way, and so to Kilcumin on Loch Ness, the Fort Augustus of to-day. On the map it is an easy, if somewhat devious course, and you may hear the summer tourist exclaiming over the grandeur of its scenery. In January, 1645, its scenery consisted of innumerable white bens, black crags and clefts, lawless streams and snow-choked defiles. As for roads, it was trackless as the face of ocean, a route for an army to perish on. Yet the march was a holiday trip compared with what was coming.

At Kilcumin, as he rested a short space, the most heartening intelligence reached Montrose. The fickle Seaforth, he learned, was out at the head of the Covenanters of Moray, Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, thus conveniently bringing the scattered opponents of the northern shires to a focus. Here was the very mercy of Heaven for which he had prayed. The intelligence reached him in the evening; the army would march in the dawn, straight upon Inverness where Seaforth and his levies lay. But before the dawn there was other and more important news still.

The camp was snoring, and Montrose sitting alone in a deep reverie, when all at once Keppoch burst in upon him, wildly agitated.

"What, not asleep yet, Keppoch?" said Montrose, looking up in surprise.

"It's not sleep I'm likely to be thinking of this

night, my lord," was Keppoch's reply. "Is your lordship prepared for news?"

"*Toujours prêt*, Keppoch," Montrose responded lightly, getting to his feet. "*Toujours prêt*, but not, if you please, *toujours perdrix*. What have we now?" He took it to be another fracas between some of the many hostile elements in his camp.

"A thing to make the ears tingle surely enough, my lord," said Keppoch. "Here's Ian Lom Macdonald, my bard—come forward, Ian, till his lordship sees ye. I will say this, my lord, that Ian has the prettiest way ye ever saw of turning a song, be it of war, or wine, or love, or the chase, or aught else that comes within the scope of his bardery."

"I am indeed proud to meet so distinguished a brother of the craft," said Montrose, acknowledging Ian's presence and accomplishments with a courtly and gracious bow. "I am myself on occasion a creeping and diffident suitor of the Muse, but it fills me with sorrow to think she disdains my poor worship, looking askance on me, mayhap, as one called indeed but not chosen. Perchance she dislikes the sword, at any rate in the hand of a suitor."

"Nay, nay, my lord Marquis, she loves it," returned Ian, greatly flattered by this reception. "At no time is she so favourable to my poor wooing as when I sing the brave deeds of the claymore. And I warrant if things go as they promise the honour will be mine to offer your lordship some little thing in disproof of what you are pleased to allege, just a bit of a lilt, an *orrain*, as we say hereabout, that will maybe amuse your lordship and make the hearts of the lads fain."

"I am indeed no Agamemnon to be worthy of such a Homer," returned Montrose modestly. "But I crave your pardon, Keppoch. Ah! poesy, poesy, what bewitchment is thine. Am I right in thinking, my dear Keppoch, that Ian has brought intelligence of importance to us all?"

"Truly, my lord," answered Keppoch, "Ian has run the whole length of Glenroy and a good bittie to the

back of it without stopping, and this is the word he brings, that Argyle is back with a battalion of Baillie's Lowlanders from Dunbarton, that his own men, taking heart from this, are up and out again, and that the lot of them have been burning and harrying in that part of the Lochaber country which pertains to your humble servant."

Montrose was manifestly astonished. "You are quite sure of this, Ian?" he said, looking keenly at the bard. "'Tis almost impossible to think that Argyle would follow us into Lochaber."

"Unlikely it may be, my lord of Montrose," replied Ian. "But I am surety for the truth of it. Four days ago he crossed the ferry of Ballachuilish. He is this minute at his castle of Inverlochy."

"And with thrice our number, the thief and robber," put in Keppoch.

"This is news indeed," said Montrose, after a moment's flashing thought. "Keppoch, do me the favour of asking Alastair Macdonald to come to me here at once, and please you tell Airlie, Sir Thomas Ogilvie, Moidart, and the rest to come also."

Colkitto obeyed in scowling ill-humour, having just gone to sleep on a truss of straw. He came rubbing his eyes; but three words of Ian's tidings made him wide enough awake. Like Montrose, he found it hard to believe the report; but, unlike Montrose, he had no mind to be courteous in his doubt. "My good fellow," he said gruffly, with a hostile look at Ian, "is this just a bit of your bardery? I've to remind you it would be dangerous coming to us at this present moment with a pack of old wives' clavers."

"If ye misdoubt me, go and find out the truth from Argyle and his five thousand men for yourself," returned Ian, nettled by Colkitto's rudeness. "And I've this to say, that the word was for my own chief and not you at all," and he turned away, nose in air.

It was well for him, perhaps, that the other chiefs were hurrying in, and that the business in hand was too important to be interrupted by private pique.

"'Tis hard to believe," repeated Colkitto, when

the tale had been told again for the information of the late comers, "that Archie of Argyle has suddenly changed his ways and grown brave."

"Oh," said Keppoch, "Archie of Argyle is precisely the kind of a man who grows brave when he thinks that he has a big enough army and nobody about to molest him, except wenches and other feeble folk. It's then he's up and off for a turn in a neighbour's country."

"As you can testify, my lord of Airlie," observed Montrose, with a look at the old Earl.

"As I can testify indeed," assented Airlie. "A great warrior is 'Baldy of the Squint' when he thinks there is none to strike back."

"The present intention is plain," said Montrose. "In front is Seaforth, behind is my lord of Argyle, with Baillie and Hurry, I take it, flitting to and fro to act as occasion needs. You see the game? Their pious intent is to take us in front, in the rear, and on both flanks. 'Tis a great scheme."

"And almost a pity to spoil it," remarked Struan.

"We've been obliged to do the like before," said Montrose quietly. "At present the question is, shall we go north and discuss Seaforth as we planned, or turn about and pay our compliments to Argyle? What say you, Alastair?"

"Wheel for Argyle, my lord," was the prompt answer. "Where's my pretty bard now? Ian, my good fellow, ye ken the way to Inverlochy Castle?"

"If there's a man treading heather this day that does," replied Ian, still on his high horse.

"Find us heather to tread and we'll be obliged to ye," said Macdonald, casting his eye over the white landscape, now glistening under a newly-risen moon. "If it was just a case of kittling the muir fowls' tails among the bonnie blooming heather we could do it for ourselves, man, and never fash troubling ye. What we're on the look out for now is a body, a bard or the like, to take us where none would dream we could go, through the snow-wreaths, and round them, over the mountains and among the rocks and corries, where it would be

thought only the deer could foot it. Are ye fit for the job, d'ye think ? ”

“Ye may trust Ian for that, Alastair,” put in Keppoch heartily.

“It's glad I am to hear it,” responded Alastair. “It seems a bard can be of use, then. Maybe it's as well to understand at the beginning that if we're misled there'll be food for the corbie crows. Ye see, my lord,” turning back to Montrose, “all is ready and the way plain and clear.”

“Let us march with daylight, then,” replied Montrose. “With five thousand men my lord of Argyle will, perchance, do us the honour and pleasure of standing this time.”

A little before daybreak Colkitto went off, taking Ian Lom with him for a last word about the route.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TRUMPETS IN THE DAWN

WITH the first peep of light next morning, which was Friday, the 31st of January, they set out upon such a march as you will scarcely find paralleled in all the brave annals of war. As their design was to surprise Argyle, they must take not the easiest or directest route, but the one that offered most obstacles and hence (in an enemy's calculation) the one least likely to be followed. It was, in fact, to be a dash through snow-bound fastnesses, such as only a Graham or a Macdonald would have attempted, and even to their daring would have been impossible with any troops except seasoned mountaineers. Seasoned and doubly seasoned they were in all that hardens for the battle or the march. Not one of them thought twice of hardship or doubted his own or his leader's ability.

Alastair alone doubted somewhat. Mistrusting Keppoch's bard in spite of glowing testimonials, he took his own precautions against treachery. "Ian, my man," he said blandly, "there's many a bog-hole and snow-wreath between Kilcumin and Inverlochy. It would go against my heart to lose ye." So he put a rope about Ian's waist, tying it at each end to two of his trusty Irish, who had secret instructions how to act in case the use of cold steel were expedient. "There," finishing the operation, "we're as snug as a thistle in a bottle of hay. Your place is the place of honour in front, Ian, my lad. And now where may we be likely to fall in with the Argyle thieves?"

"In Glenroy," answered Ian, with a tight mouth.

"If you see not the smoke of their burning, a good ten miles off then shoot me for a traitor and liar."

"You hear what the bard says," remarked Colkitto, his eyes gleaming curiously. "If the Campbells are not in Glenroy then it's a sign that Ian is a traitor and liar, to be dealt with as such. And now, Ian, will you be showing the lads the trick of the quick step. You have the shanks of a deer, man, the shanks of a deer. Oh, and never say halt till you're told."

In English Ian Lom signifies "Bare John," and bare he was of aught that would hinder his stride, not a hair on his face, not a grain too much on his hard, swank body. Muscle and bone he seemed to be, or perhaps wrought steel with a spring and endurance which nothing could deaden or weary. Even Alastair, with his giant limbs and enormous energy, found his match as a walker in the lank, long-legged bard, and something more than his match, it may be, in wit.

"It's the fine step ye have, man," Alastair told him once in a burst of admiration. "See you what it is to be reared on brose among the heather."

"And have Argyle before, Montrose behind and Alastair Macdonald alongside of ye," returned Ian, with scant respect in his tone.

"And that's a good jest too," quoth Alastair grimly. "I hope we'll be as merry when we have hunted the Campbell rogues out of Glenroy and come in by the back of Ben Nevis."

"Merry or not, it's the getting there that's the thing," rejoined Ian.

"And d'ye think ye can be mending the pace a bit?" inquired Alastair.

"It's not easy with two men hanging on the rope," replied Ian sourly. "But we'll do what we can, as the eagle said when it pecked out the eyes of the blind otter. Have ye no joints in ye at all, that ye're so stiff?" he demanded, looking from one to the other of the men bound to him. He was savage for the affront of the binding, and those who followed paid the price.

The march was a scaling of mountains that appeared unscalable, a scrambling over snow-bound rocks, a floundering in snow-blocked gorges and chasms, a wading of streams that cut and gored with floating ice. For Ian, true to his promise, took them by the least likely and most difficult paths, or rather by no paths at all, the first armed men who ever trod that trackless way. They went up Glen Tarff with blithe morning hearts, singing snatches of ballads, jesting uncouthly, reminding one another boisterously that Argyle was waiting for them. The savage Corryarrick reduced them to silence, for in that sheer climb the best of them had need to reserve his wind. With set, determined faces they clambered among the yawning cliffs, keeping foothold like goats and often appearing no bigger than ants crawling over some craggy desert of the Arctics. All forenoon the wind blew in puffs and gusty drift, heralds of the coming storm. Before they reached the top it was upon them in a blinding, suffocating tornado.

On a fine summer day you may stand on the ridgy crest of Corryarrick and view more peaks than you care to count from Moray Firth to Isle of Skye, with many a green valley, many a sunlit loch and stream shining and twinkling between. In that grey, driving swirl Montrose and his men saw none of them, or only here and there at intervals, looming like monstrous wreathed apparitions. The elements, it seemed, had risen in aid of Argyle. That day the very stag turned tail on the terrors of the terrible Corryarrick and led his hinds to the corries below.

"For God's sake, Alastair, let the men keep close," said Montrose to his Major-General, noting how they staggered and reeled in the tempest. "If they lose touch we are lost." Then Alastair, not for the first time nor the last, showed himself the true soldier and Trojan. He was everywhere, in front directing, in the midst urging, behind driving more fiercely than the gale, and always erect and clear-eyed as if the pelting snow but made him see the better.

Some of the chiefs, knowing what was ahead, would

have rested their men at Corryarrick foot ; but Alastair would have no slackening. The wilder the storm, the greater the need for haste. Beyond were the sheltered valleys where they could recover breath, beyond, too, were the Campbells. "Mind that," he would cry at every sign of weakness, lifting his face as in defiance of the lashing tempest. "Mind that. Are we sheep to bleat because a handful of dry snow takes us in the face ? 'Tuts, an hour and we're by with it. And just think you how we're favoured. For if all the Campbells unhanged were skulking behind rocks with muskets ready never a man of us could they see this day. Ach ! but it's the fine weather for taking a fox unaware."

They mounted the crest in a tearing blizzard, the hardiest and best of them scarcely able to keep his feet, and swept down the other side to the head waters of the Spey in a kind of drunken exhilaration, Alastair cheering and hounding them on. By this time bleeding feet were common. The Major-General no sooner perceived it than his own brogues were off and slung across his shoulder. "Better without them," he cried ; "they just make a body slip. Ho, ho ! was ever eider-down daintier to the touch than the soft, sweet snow ? It's better than Inverary wine to have the feel of it in one's bare feet."

They crossed from the Spey to Glenroy, and here the scouts expected to find the Campbells raiding. But not a red beard of them was to be seen in all the glen. Colkitto turned to Ian Lom. "Ye hear, Ian," he remarked. "So it's to be as we bargained. Well, well, it's in luck ye are any way, for my men are the prettiest hands at the job ye ever saw in your life. Ye'll understand we have little time to waste on ceremony. So if ye'll be making ready, Ian."

Ian was thunderstruck. "Is it for shooting me ye are ?" he asked with a gasp. "Ye'll notice the Campbells have been in Glenroy."

"Doubtless, doubtless," Alastair returned grimly. "But they're nowhere in it now. It seems we came all this way for nothing. I misdoubted ye, Ian, my

man, I misdoubted ye; but I'll see to it that you have no reason to misdoubt me. Here, blindfold him," he ordered a sergeant.

Just then Montrose chanced to come up. "What have we here?" he asked in surprise, at sight of Ian fighting for his life.

"A man who has chosen his own way of paying the price of treachery," replied Alastair.

"Treachery," repeated Montrose. "There must be some mistake. Will you tell me what has happened?" And on hearing the tale: "I think you'll find Ian a leal man. What has happened, I think, is that the Campbells have been here and gone. I'd give Ian another trial, Alastair, and maybe you'll take off the rope."

Alastair glowered at Ian like a vulture deprived of its prey. "Let him be," he told his men roughly, and with his own sword cut the rope.

"I would obey Alastair without argument if I were you," Montrose told Ian privily.

"Dog of the Isles," growled Ian ferociously, "I'll be up sides with him yet."

"Put him in a ballad," smiled Montrose. "Show him how much harder the pen can hit than the sword. We, the votaries of the Muse, have our own pretty way of paying debts. Ah! 'tis a nice art, Ian, a nice art. Practise it delicately; guard it jealously. And now, if you please, let's on."

At the end of twelve hours, that is to say when night was falling, Alastair consented to call a halt. "The men have well earned it, Alastair," Montrose told him. "Neither bite nor sup nor a minute's rest since we left Kilcumin in the dawn. Yes, I think they've earned it."

Alastair cast his eye backward over the darkening huddle of bens. The storm was over and the innumerable domes, massive yet oddly spectral in the grey twilight, contrasted weirdly in their passionless composure with the roaring tumult of the day. In that tumult, in teeth of a snowy tornado, the king's army trod the mountain wilderness, without loss of man

or horse. Alastair knew the feat was prodigious and, little as he was disposed to flatter, he answered, "The lads have done well enough. I thought they were going to stick on us on Corryarrick, but they tore on and here they are. Another march like to-day's and Archibald Campbell will be hearing from us."

The army broke its long fast on dramach (a mess of oatmeal and cold water), Montrose, Macdonald, Airlie and the rest supping like the men about them, with the knives from their belts for spoons. Like the men, too, they threw themselves on the bed of snow and slept like tired-out children, all save the General, who went to and fro very wide awake. At an outpost in front he came upon a sentry asleep in the dead weariness that was not to be resisted. Montrose regarded the man a moment in pity and then, quietly possessing himself of his musket, kept guard. When he could remain no longer, for fear of being discovered, he gently awoke the sleeper, who started up in a horror of shame and fright. Montrose made a gesture for silence. "Hush," he whispered, "all is well. Your watch has been faithfully kept. On your life not a word of this to any one. If it came to the ears of Major-General Macdonald I verily believe he would have us both shot. We must resolve to do better next time." And on that genial warning he vanished.

With the rising of the moon the army was again afoot, Alastair, in his impatience, rousing the sluggards with his sword-point. The second day was as the first, save that there was no storm to buffet, nor a Corryarrick to be passed; but the way would still be impassable to any men not impelled by the fiercest of motives, absorbed in the fiercest of passions. The nearer they drew to their quarry the more ardent they became. The sight of the huge black precipices of Ben Nevis animated like the faces of friends; at the first glimpse of the towers of Inverlochy they could not forbear a cheer. The weather was now frosty and the air crystalline clear, so that the castle stood defined against the southern sky in all its picturesque and massive strength. Above it the blue smoke hung with a pathetic

suggestion of domestic peace. Ere many hours were gone, there would be another tale to tell.

The force went down Glen Nevis as if newly starting ; no limp, no weariness now in the swinging stride of bleeding, barefooted men. Feet might be raw and hacked, but what were wounds with the hated Campbells so near ? Ian Lom, hardy greyhound as he was, could scarcely keep his place in front, and Alastair had little need to urge. As for Montrose, his heart was leaping with a new tide, the tide of fresh victory.

At nightfall a party of Argyle's scouts were surprised and cut off, the first token of coming battle. As word of this capture ran along the lines the whole force tingled, and like leopards stealing upon their prey, slipped the more swiftly and relentlessly along.

But the fox had still, it seemed, the old keen nose for danger. The scouts were surprised ; not so Argyle. He was half undressed to lie down in his stronghold when word reached him that his outposts were engaged with the enemy. Immediately he redressed, and called a council of war. There were many brave men about him, some good soldiers too ; the most noted being Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchenbreck, lately recalled from Ireland to join in the great hunt, as Argyle was pleased to call it. The hasty conference ended on the conclusion that the reported enemy was but a predatory band—some petty clan or company of thieves who would pounce and run as usual.

“What we have to pray for, my lord,” said Auchenbreck, “is that their folly may lead them near enough to enable us to make them pay for it.”

“You think, then, James Graham himself is not with them ?” said Argyle wistfully. He had his arm in a sling, having some weeks before, as the Committee of Estates learned with grief, dislocated his shoulder by a fall.

“Nay, my lord,” replied Auchenbreck. “An’ I know anything of soldiering, an army could not come from Lochaber in a night and weather like this. Besides, was he not flying to the north by the last accounts. I’m in hope that ere now Seaforth has him by the throat.”

"'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished," responded Argyle, looking ruefully at his disabled arm. "But you little know, Sir Duncan, how slippery is this eel of a Graham. Never man before had such an art of slipping through the fingers. Am I not the unlucky man?" he cried in the next breath. "Here, when I should be using my sword for my country, I am on the shelf with a raxed arm. Could misfortune have come at an unluckier hour?"

Aunchenbreck regarded him a moment with a keen if respectful look, and then as though divining what was in his mind, remarked—

"There be men enough here to use the sword. Any common fellow is good enough to hack a rebel in two. Full well we know where your lordship would be, at the head of your army leading it against traitors, and glad were we to have it so. But a hurt is a hurt, great or humble, and I ask your lordship to consider this. Is not the head better than the hand?"

"You are too kind," responded Argyle, with a meek diffidence. "Indeed you are too kind. It is true my arm would be little use in battle to-day. As for directing, I remember me my galley lies close outside: thence I could see all that happens and have freedom of action. Yes, from my barge I could communicate with you freely as might be needful. Oh! this raxed arm, this raxed arm, in a sling when it ought to be slitting rebel veins. But, as Auchenbreck reminds me, I have a duty still to perform, and, believe me, Argyle will not be found wanting. I bow to your counsels."

A man reasoned with according to the wish of his heart is easily persuaded. Wherefore Argyle, instead of buckling on his armour, went out in the moonlight to his galley, leaving Auchenbreck in command. For companions and advisers he had Sir James Rollock of Duncrab, brother of Montrose's Will Rollock, the laird of Niddry, a servile creature of his own, an Edinburgh bailie, come north for sport, and Mr. Mungo Law, an Edinburgh minister, whom "he had invited to go along with him to bear witness to the wonders he

purposed to perform in that expedition." We shall see presently how the good man was gratified.

Muffled in his cloak, Argyle paced the galley deck, mostly in silence, waiting and watching for events on shore. Word reached him from time to time of light skirmishes, things of no moment, he was assured, except as indicating the insignificance of the foe. All clan Diarmid hoped and prayed for was that the rebels would be good enough to await daylight; then his lordship should hear something, a prophecy duly and dramatically fulfilled.

Meantime, finding that the alarm was given and Argyle's force under arms, Montrose halted his men near the mouth of Glen Nevis, where order of battle was formed. The disposition was this: In the place of honour on the right were the Macdonalds under Colkitto, a regiment of Irish under the gallant O'Cahan occupying the left. In the centre were the Atholemen, the Camerons, the Appin Stewarts, the Macleans, Macnabs, and Glencoe men. Here too was the Royal Standard, supported by a squadron of horse under Sir Thomas Ogilvie and Sir William Rollock. In the second or reserve line were Clanranald and Glengarry, with more Highlanders and Irish for support. Thus they stood to their arms in the frosty moonlight, comforted by more dramach, a cold repast in the freezing night, but thrice welcome to men whom nothing but the ardour of battle kept from dropping of hunger.

The night was enlivened by sharp splutterings of musketry, but Montrose had given strict orders there was to be no ill-considered rush on a supposed advantage; and Alastair himself saw that the order was obeyed. Like a lion he strode from front to rear, growling in his impatience, pricking up this company and that, exclaiming on the tardy hours. "How time lags," he would cry. "Will the night never end?" "Presently, presently, Alastair," Montrose would reply softly. "Patience just for a little." He was no less ardent than his Major-General, but he understood perhaps more clearly the folly of rashness.

In one of his rounds Alastair came upon Montrose and Ian Lom talking together with some animation. Ian had come to claim his brogue-money, or reward as guide, and was smiling contentedly over it in the moment that Alastair stopped abruptly.

"Well," he said, looking severely at the bard, "brogue-money, brogue-money, that's a reward for bardery. Here, Ian, my man, come along with me and I'll be getting ye a pike."

"I'm not used to the pike," Ian returned curtly.

"You'll never learn the use of it younger," was the rejoinder. "Let us see that a bard is good for something besides idle ballad-making. It's gay and fain ye'll be at the chance of fighting the foe and robber of your chief Keppoch."

"Do you go and fight to-day, Alastair, and I will tell the tale of it to-morrow," said Ian haughtily.

"Every man to his trade," laughed Montrose. "I think we may leave Ian to the practice of his craft."

Alastair grunted. "I suppose he may go," he said, "though we are somewhat more in need of pikemen than bards."

At last the moon sank, a brief, black darkness fell, and then all at once as it seemed to the watchful eyes, the east shivered and trembled with light.

"See, see, my lord!" Colkitto cried. "Is it not time?"

"It is time," answered Montrose, his eyes shining. "Macdonald, give the order to advance."

In a flash Colkitto's sword was out. "Lochiel," he bellowed to the chief of the Camerons, "let your pipers strike up."

"It's the word I've been waiting for," answered Lochiel, and next minute the Cameron pibroch, an invitation to the ravens and eagles, *Come and I will give you flesh*, broke rantingly on the frosty air.

The Campbells, listening intently, caught the first note of it. "The Camerons," they told each other, "the Camerons. There will indeed be flesh for the eagles this day." Whereupon the Campbell slogan rose in reply.

By this time every piper in the Royalist force was blowing his utmost, and the foot, cheering furiously, swung forward. Montrose watched them a minute and then, quick and eager as a boy, turned to Sir Thomas Ogilvie. "Ogilvie," he cried, a wild thrill in his voice, "salute the standard," ; and with the first rays of dawn tipping them the trumpets rang gallantly, making the echoes peal and peal again.

Argyle heard and stopped in his pacing on the barge. "What is that?" he asked sharply, and before any one could answer he added, "'Tis the Royal salute. James Graham is there, as I suspected." And his countenance became as clay.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PIBROCH OF DONALD DHU

THE Royalists debouched from Glen Nevis to find Argyle's army, more than twice their own strength, drawn up on a level plain a short distance in front, and ready for action. A furious clamour of bugles, drums, and pipes greeted them ; but the din of music was drowned by the hoarse yell, or rather the roar of menace and defiance, which broke simultaneously from both sides.

A glance showed that Auchenbreck had laid out his men with the skill of a trained and practised soldier, —Baillie's regiments on the wings, clan Diarmid and its Highland allies in the centre imposingly arrayed in tartan, targe and broad sword, with the black galley of Lorn floating over them. Another galley hard by made a less brave or reputable show.

No time was lost over courtesies, for while the roar from five thousand throats was still reverberating, a great gun boomed and a whistling, vicious sound passed over the Royalist ranks. Immediately Auchenbreck moved his men forward to the attack, his musketeers firing as they went. The Royalists, too, were moving, so that, contrary to rule, both sides swept to the charge.

To his chief officers Montrose had already given explicit orders. "No firing," he told them as at Tippermuir, "till you can pour it hot shot into their beards. Then a volley and on them before they can recover." Nobly and faithfully was he obeyed. When his men were almost at striking distance three volleys from right, left, and centre went into the solid ranks of Auchen-

breck, and as with a leap through the thick smoke the Royalists were upon their staggering foes, with claymore and Lochaber axe, with pike, with musket butt, and a fury not to be withstood. The Argyle men stopped, reeled, fell back as if swept by an angry sea, but recovered quickly under the incentive and example of their officers, brave men doing bravely. Then for a little while, a very little while, body to body the slashing and hewing went on. Both sides struck for their lives, knowing it was win or die, for there was no thought of quarter.

Argyle's men came to the combat rested, fresh, full of meat, full of confidence, well clad, well armed; Montrose's, after such a march on such fare as we know, ill-armed and in tatters, but their energy was demonic. They had not marched forty miles in two days over snow-clad mountains to play at war. They had turned in their tracks to do—what they were doing. "Tippermuir," "Aberdeen," they cried hoarsely, and struck the harder.

Argyle looking from his galley, wrung his hands and sent futile messages, which were never delivered. "God help us," he cried, "God help us," and then with a kind of sardonic irony, "Mr. Law, Mr. Law, what came ye forth for to see?"

At first he lay close in, meaning to step ashore in the moment of victory, but as the combat deepened and hope grew faint he ordered his galley to be drawn further out. His troops suffered nothing from his absence, for Heaven had made Auchenbreck what it certainly did not make Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyle—a brave and capable soldier. Riding hither and thither in the very midst of the conflict, he seemed to be wherever his men needed support and encouragement, and that was presently everywhere.

In thus rallying them he rode almost within sword-reach of Colkitto.

"Come down," Alastair called to him tauntingly. "Come down, man, and let us have a look at ye on foot."

"No need to go down," returned Auchenbreck, wheeling his horse. Fire blazed in his eyes ; his face was swollen and distorted with the rage of battle. "I'll deal with the like of you where I am ;" and suiting the action to the word, he swung his long sword, bringing it down, as appeared, on the very crown of Colkitto's head. But Alastair ducked, parrying the blow, and then with one stroke sent Auchenbreck's charger on its nose. "You can have your life," he cried, leaping forward, "if you yield me your sword." For with all his ferocity he honoured this man's gallantry.

"My life," retorted Auchenbreck, springing to his feet in a gush of blood from his horse. "My life, and from you, dog of an Ernoeh (Irishman) ; you shall pay for that insult. Die like the vermin ye are."

In all Argyle's army there was not the match of Auchenbreck with the broadsword. He had all Alastair's bulk and thew, as deep a chest, as long a reach, perhaps equal skill, and certainly an equal fierceness of temper. As the pair came together the men about them paused, holding their breath, to watch the duel of the Titans. They had not to watch long. The blades tinkled, clashed, and tinkled again, then swished like steel on the grindstone. Of a sudden Auchenbreck stepped back a pace to get his distance, meaning to end the thing by one of the swinging blows with which he had so often brought down an adversary. But Alastair pressed, so that he gave yet another step and another. A Campbell subaltern, perceiving how matters went, rushed to his leader's aid, but Auchenbreck swore at him to be off. "To your own business," he said, never lifting his eye off his antagonist. "I'm fit for this myself."

"Show it, then," said Alastair, pressing yet harder. The swords tinkled lightly, but with exceeding viciousness, as each man, lithely poised, sought his advantage, then all at once swished again with that fearful and furious suggestion of whetting. In the midst of the swishing, a dart of red lightning, so quick it was, Alastair's blade rose, glimmered the tenth part of a second in the air, and clove sheer down, his whole ferocious

might in the stroke. There was a sharp cry of horror. Auchenbreck staggered, tried to recover, dropped to his knees, and rolled over on his now useless sword, the purple fury of his face all at once turned to a ghastly white. But his fierceness was not yet spent. As with a spasm of dying energy he plucked a pistol from his belt and fired point blank, muttering a half-choked imprecation. The ball grazed Colkitto's cheek, drawing a trickle of blood. "Like yourself to the last," panted Alastair. "Take that for your courtesy." As he set his foot on Auchenbreck's body the effect was as the fall of Goliath on the army of the Philistines.

Instantly a great shout, running from company to company along the whole length of the Royalist line, told what had happened. To Argyle's men it was as the trump of doom. Their brave captain, the Hector in whom they all trusted, was slain. Overwhelmed and dismayed by the triumphant fury of their assailants, Baillie's Lowlanders broke, and next minute as it seemed clan Diarmid was on their heels.

"See, my lord, see what is happening," Ogilvie said excitedly to Montrose, who was with the little group of horse in the rear. "I pray you give us leave to charge."

"And quickly, my lord, quickly," put in Rollock, "or the rogues will be off ere we can pay them our respects."

Montrose gazed a moment at the dire havoc in front. "You have leave," he replied, with a thrill of long-suppressed excitement. "Charge. But give quarter when it is asked. See to that, Ogilvie. Rollock, have the goodness to acquaint Major-General Macdonald with my wish. I like not indiscriminate slaughter."

The trumpets sounded, and the horsemen were off, every sword drawn, every head craned for the shock. Montrose following alone, saw them storm in among the distracted, discomfited foe. The rest was havoc. For nine miles the rout was pursued, every yard of the way marking a gory vengeance. For Alastair was conveniently deaf to the order about giving quarter, and the chiefs about him were as deaf as he. That

day the sword drank its fill to the wiping out of many an old and bitter score.

From his galley the Campbell chief saw his men driven into the sea, saw the waters run red with their blood, saw them lift their impotent hands in appeal to him for succour. He shut his eyes to the sight, Mungo Law comforting him with scraps of Holy Writ.

All at once Mr. Law cried out at sight of a little group on the very rim of the horizon. "My lord, my lord, I profess they are making a stand," he announced. "They ran but to allure the enemy on. Be like Joshua, of a stout heart and a good courage; you shall yet be avenged of all your foes."

Argyle strained his eyes, holding his breath for a gleam of hope. "It is no rally," he said bitterly, and turned away.

He was right. His men made no stand. Only one of them, turning in his panic, fired blindly, and by a fatal chance the bullet found Sir Thomas Ogilvie. The group was a company of lamenting friends, Montrose himself being one of them.

"Is the wound bad?" the General asked, dismounting and bending on his knee beside the fallen man.

"To death, I fear me," answered Ogilvie, looking up wanly. "My lord, I've done my duty. Father"—turning his eyes to the old Earl who bent by Montrose—"it is as you wished."

"Exactly, exactly as I wished, Tom," answered Airlie, dropping his grey head that the onlookers should not see his face, a brave father taking leave of a brave son.

"Your lordship has won a most signal victory," Ogilvie whispered feebly. "Tell the king that one of the humblest and least worthy of his servants died for him gladly, say gladly, my lord. And now your lordship must not waste time over me."

Montrose grasped the relaxing hand. "His Majesty shall know all," he replied softly. "Friends," he added, rising, "I must needs ride forward. Take care of him till I return."

He had ridden but a short distance when he met

the Major-General returning from the chase, reeling from exhaustion and transported with joy.

"An exceeding great and glorious victory," he cried. "Cast your eye about, my lord. What think you of it?"

"A complete and terrible victory," answered Montrose. "Where are the lads that they come not back with you?"

"The lads," said Colkitto, "are taking breath like tired dogs where they chanced to lie down."

"Is not there some danger that the enemy will wheel back upon them?" Montrose asked. Colkitto laughed disdainfully.

"As much danger as of the hare turning on the hound," he replied. "The enemy, my lord, or what's left of them, are in such a mortal hurry to get away they have time to think of nothing but how to use their legs in saving their skins. If our lads had not marched so far and fasted so long just before engaging, to-morrow morning your lordship would be hearing that not a man of Argyle's army was left. Heigh! but it's been a great mercy."

"I hear you settled accounts with Auchenbreck yourself," said Montrose.

"What else could I do?" responded Alastair, with a smirk. "The man would not keep out of my way, so I had just to march over him. They're poor hands with the claymore, the greasy Campbells, and as for Baillie's Lowland trash, there's nothing in all the world they can so little thole as the push of a Highland man's pike. I never saw men better at the running."

"Can you give me any notion of the bill of mortality?" asked Montrose.

"O'Cahan is counting up the dead," answered Colkitto, "and it pleases me to tell your lordship he's finding most of them in Campbell tartan."

The reckoning showed that of the three thousand brave and confident men of Argyle's army fifteen hundred were left on the field, not counting prisoners, while the Royalists' loss in dead was but three private soldiers. Such is the tale of Inverlochy fight and the

wondrous deeds Argyle did not perform. Little wonder that in spite of private grief for Ogilvie, Montrose reported to the king, in the high-hearted manner of Joab after the taking of Rabbah: "Give me leave after I have reduced this country to your Majesty's obedience and conquered from Dan to Beersheba, to say to your Majesty as David's general said to his master, *Come thou thyself lest this country be called by my name.*"

CHAPTER XXXV

AFTERMATH : JOY AND MOURNING

ONCE again my lord of Argyle showed that nice concern for a whole skin which ever distinguished him in a crisis. While his drowning and frantic men screeched and lifted imploring hands to him for the refuge of his galley, he hoisted sail and made off, turning his back so that he should not see the hideousness of his own shame.

On Sabbath the 2nd of February, he was put to open shame at Inverlochy. On the 12th he entered the Parliament House in Edinburgh, "having his arm tied up in a scarf, as if he had been at bones breaking," and bearing in general a very forlorn appearance. He had hastened up to give his own version of what had happened and justify himself according to need. Never was there a better orator in his own cause. He told his story so well, presented so dramatic and affecting a picture of the maimed martyr, that Parliament, full of compassion and admiration, thanked him for the superb valour he had displayed at Inverlochy, and the priceless sacrifices he was ever so ready to make for the public weal, humbly praying him to continue in his laudable cause. Such is the virtue of oratory.

For their own comfort and encouragement, the Estates also, with due solemnity and sense of responsible power, pronounced doom of death and forfeiture on James Graham, "sometime Earl of Montrose," and all his associates in the abominable business of defeating Argyle. Accordingly the citizens made gala day at the Cross of Edinburgh, to witness the grand ceremony of erasing the Arms of Montrose, Airlie, and his two

sons, Colkitto, Inchbrakie, and other Royalist reprobates and villains from the registers, and behold their escutcheons rent by the hangman under the direction of the Lord Lyon. The rites were performed with striking unction and success, though a humorist here and there among the spectators wondered privily what would befall were Montrose and his outlaws suddenly to appear and inquire into the justice of the proceedings.

Meanwhile James Graham was adding to his enormities by doing to Seaforth and Baillie as he had done to Elcho, Burleigh, and Argyle. To that end he once more whipped about, marched back through the snowy wilds of Lochaber, swiftly as if they were summer highways, called at Inverness in hope of finding Seaforth and his levies, learned they had gone to Elgin, and followed them thither. Surrounded by the northern barons, Seaforth was, in fact, bravely providing "for the safety of the north," but at the news of Montrose's approach chief and barons retired without standing too nicely on the order of their going, and the Elgin burgesses, having nothing else for it, gracefully surrendered their town. He took possession in the morning, and by evening had a yet deeper and rarer joy.

In the winter dusk there rode up with a mighty clattering a party of horsemen led by three cavaliers of distinguished appearance. At the sentinel's challenge one of the three cried out impatiently, "Friends, you goose, friends. I pray you, my good fellow, let the Marquis be informed at once. He is here, is he not?"

"He is here," answered the Marquis, stepping out (he had run at sound of the familiar voice), "and most heartily welcomes Colonel Nathaniel Gordon. Ah! and other dear friends, as I live. My lord Gordon, I give you joyous greeting, and you, too, my lord Lewis. This is indeed the wine that maketh the heart glad. Dismount, dismount I pray you, and taste our poor hospitality. Your gallant lads," casting an eye over their followers, "and all your horses will have what fare and attention our exigencies afford."

Nathaniel Gordon looked from one to another of the company in huge good humour with himself and the

scene. In part, at least, he had kept the promise made in that enigmatic letter which was thrown into Montrose's lines on the night of darkness and desertion at Fyvie. He had not indeed succeeded in bringing in Huntly himself, the old bear still sulked in his den, but here were his two brave sons, with a well-furnished troop of horse, in sweet earnest of what was yet to come.

"We were at Bog of Gicht," said the Colonel, when they were seated with Montrose over a bottle of wine, "and heard of your coming here ; so we just lap on our horses and rode for it. My lord Gordon found the time growing longsome on the other side."

"I wager a plack," said Montrose, smiling, "my lord Gordon found a much better reason than that for coming."

"That he did," agreed the Colonel promptly. "The bonds of Argyle are burst. Tut, is a gallant cavalier, fit to ride and rout it with the best, to be for ever in swaddling clothes to his mother's brother ? As for Ludovick here, let him but get at the snivelling rogues who would give us parson-rule in this gay land of ours while crying out upon priests and prelates, and he will be blithe to show your excellency what metal his sword is made of."

"A Gordon sword was never yet made of base metal," said Montrose, bowing graciously to each brother in turn. "In the king's name and on the king's behalf I give you both the right hand of comradeship."

"In the king's name and on the king's behalf we joyously accept it, my lord Marquis," responded the elder. "And in putting at his Majesty's service the sword your lordship has been pleased to speak of so kindly, we pray you look not too narrowly or jealously to the past."

"Nay, nay, my lord Gordon," cried Montrose gaily, "take me not for a black advised inquisitor from the Convention of Estates. I take the day as I find it, caring not to recall at high noon that the morning perchance was stormy or overcast. If Lord Gordon and Lord Lewis were to be condemned for choosing their

own way I greatly fear me the Marquis of Montrose must be far past redemption."

"I congratulate your lordship upon a most glorious and absolute victory," said Lord Gordon.

"The lads fought well," returned Montrose, politely remembering that he was talking to the nephews of Argyle. "But indeed I care not to turn my eyes on the past. The coming event is always in front. And now, if you please, we will try the fare of the honest folk of Elgin."

"Indeed then, my lord," said the Colonel gladly, preparing to fall to, "I will not deny that a ride from Bog of Gicht to Elgin in a crisp day of winter makes the appetite somewhat importunate. I warrant you George and Ludovick are ready to prove their abilities as trencher-men."

"We shall gladly have proof," remarked Montrose genially. "No ceremony, if you please, my lords and gentlemen. We dine in the Adam fashion."

Interrupted in the great task of providing for the safety of the north, Seaforth took to the mountains, and in their benign solitudes pondered the course of events and his own chances in the gory game of chess which the Fates were now playing. The moral of Inverlochy was too pointed to be ignored. Wherefore, my lord Seaforth, Royalist to-day, Covenanter to-morrow, as fear or interest dictated, like the vicar of the ballad turned cat-in-pan once more. In other words, he returned to Montrose with his Mackenzies, submissive, penitent, and full of ardour for king and monarchy. With him, too, came the laird of Grant (father-in-law of Lewis Gordon, lately wed), bringing three hundred good swords. Grant's loyalty had feminine inspiration; for his lady wife, as the quaint chronicler tells, "a sweet, charming nightingale, did never cease powerfullie to agent the justice of the king's cause with her husband." By the same token the laird's daughter was bred a Royalist, and to her, more than to the persuasiveness of the gallant Nathaniel Gordon, was due the presence in Montrose's camp of her boy-husband, Lord Lewis.

Enforced and animated afresh, Montrose visited his old quarters at Bog of Gicht where the castle was held by his friend, Gordon of Buckie, a cavalier of seventy with the fire of twenty. He arrived with a high heart ; he departed in mourning. For his son and heir, Lord Graham, who had accompanied him bravely through all his late marches, lay down to die in Huntly's castle, exhausted at fifteen. The Marquis buried him in Bellie Kirk, and with a set face over a rent heart went about the king's business. Only when the bugles sounded he stole away to kneel for a moment unseen by the grave which held so much of his love and his hope. When he rose, his eyes shining mistily, he knew that whatever felicity awaited him, whatever victories might come, one deep, intimate bliss was gone for ever. Yet his enemies found that private grief in no wise diminished the energy and celerity of his movements. With incredible swift-ness he scoured the country, striking terror into enemies, cheering friends, everywhere increasing the king's authority and his own fame.

A glance at Aberdeen brought forth the Provost and Bailies on tremulous legs beseeching him to be merciful in the day of his power. Never disposed to be aught else, he bargained peaceably for a contribution of men, arms, and horses, Colonel Nathaniel Gordon being charged with the duty of receiving the levy. Now, as all the world knows, valour does not exclude vanity. To impress the honest folk of Aberdeen, Colonel Gordon borrowed the handsomest charger in the Royalist camp, a gift from Huntly to Lord Gordon, and rode in high state attended by Donald Farquharson, "the pride of Braemar," and a troop of eighty horse, mostly gentlemen. The business done, the gallants put on gorgeous new apparel, and gave themselves to festivity. They were hard at their merriment, which is to say their wassail, when all of a sudden the street without resounded with a clamour of men and horses. Drawing their swords, they rushed forth, to find Sir John Hurry and eight score troopers awaiting them. Farquharson fell almost as he crossed the tavern threshold, and others were made prisoners.

Gordon escaped, leaving Huntly's charger to Forbes of Craigievar, an inveterate foe, and returned on foot with the remnant of his escort to the Marquis at Kintore.

"It was the bad wine they have in Aberdeen did it, my lord," pleaded the crestfallen colonel. "And we thought the knave Hurry miles away."

"You placed guards and sentinels, of course?" said the Marquis.

"'Tis my honest belief we thought it not at all necessary," answered Gordon.

"Is it Colonel Gordon who tells me this?" cried the Marquis, and his look made even the old cavalier quail. "Have the goodness to go to my tent and there await my coming. Macdonald, take a thousand of our men, horse and foot, and have Donald Farquharson buried as befits a valiant soldier and true friend. I have pledged my word of honour that in our present coming to Aberdeen no violence shall be done to any man therein. See you to it."

"Your Excellency's pledge is a bond for us all," responded Macdonald. And so it was, to the surprise and joy of the terrified town.

Elate and daring on the success of his exploit, Hurry dashed from Aberdeen to Montrose, where he snatched James, now Lord Graham, from his lessons and sent the boy a prisoner to the Convention of Estates in Edinburgh. This news reached the Marquis while he lay at Kintore, and yet another misfortune there befell him in the sickness of the Earl of Airlie.

"Leave me, my lord," said the old soldier; "let not the king's cause suffer because of my weakness and inability."

"The king would render me small thanks for such scurvy discourtesy to one of his officers, my lord Airlie," returned Montrose. "It shall in no wise be done as you propose."

Thereupon he ordered Inchbrakie to get ready a strong escort and conduct the Earl to Strathbogie.

"Do I go too, my lord?" asked Murray of Tullibardine.

"It were meet, methinks," answered Montrose with a humorous twinkle, "since the Lady Kitty is to nurse her father. Take care of her, Murray, among the muskets and claymores; on that head the Fates may give us a merry dance yet."

And Murray went off, blushing like a school-girl.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WAR AND WINE : AN ILL MIXTURE

"AND where now, my lord ?" asked the Major-General, on seeing the Strathbogie detachment off.

"With so rich a choice 'tis a nice question," answered Montrose, with a little smile. "Where would you strike first ?"

"There is Marischal," returned Alastair, "one of the most potent lords in the north, if you take his own word for it ; and a loathsome pestilence to all about him. I think our friends here," glancing at Moidart, Glengarry, and the rest, "would dearly like a word with him."

"Ay, that they would," put in Moidart, with eager emphasis, "that they would, and something more forby, it maybe."

"I mind me," pursued Alastair, "that your lordship condescended to send him a friendly message a month or two ago courteously inviting him to show the right side of his face. What did he do, my lord ?"

"Sent my letter to the Committee of Estates," answered Montrose ruefully.

"Then let him hear of it now in another way," said Colkitto meaningly. "'Tis men of his sort that breed sedition and multiply traitors. A fire at his gable end would be the most excellent medicine for him."

"March, then," said Montrose, his face grim at the memory of Marischal's treachery.

Nevertheless, from Stonehaven hard by Dunottar Castle he sent yet another message soliciting aid from

his old friend, and stating consequences if it were refused. The response was scornful and defiant.

"His blood be upon his own head then," said Montrose, and gave Macdonald and the clans the leave for which they itched.

Marischal had shut himself up in his stronghold of Dunottar, with the ubiquitous Andrew Cant and fifteen other ministers for company. From his battlements he saw his barn-yards blazing, his lands wasted, the smoke of Cowie, Ury, and Drumlithie swirling blackly in token of vengeance. The assiduous Cant comforted him with the assurance that the smoke of his worldly possessions would be a sweet-smelling incense to the Lord.

"Ay, ay," retorted Marischal savagely, and had thoughts of sending the comforter head-foremost from the wall.

Leaving Marischal to contemplate the ruin of Dunottar Barony, and appendages, Montrose sped across the Grampians, fell on Hurry's dragoons who had essayed to bar his way, and sent them in flight four and twenty miles to Dundee. Then wheeling back he came on the river Isla in Angus to find the redoubtable Baillie himself drawn up in array on the other side. The Isla is a stream which herd-boys wade without getting wet above the knee, but neither army cared to cross, Baillie being too timid, and Montrose too weak to force a passage. At the end of four days, irked with waiting, the Marquis sent his adversary this message; "Pledge me your honour that you will fight and you may cross without molestation, or if it please you better grant us the same privilege, and we will cross to you."

"The Graham grows insolent," sniffed Baillie with a lofty nose, and striking tent marched back to his stronghold at Perth.

Chafed and disappointed, Montrose circled round by Dunkeld, where he had again the bitter experience of seeing his force diminish by desertion. This time it was the fickle, ill-conditioned Lewis Gordon who went off, taking as a pretext for safety as many of the Gordon cavalry as could be induced to desert with

him. Montrose saw, truly enough, Huntly's hand in the business, but for sake of Lord George held his peace. To keep himself and the remnant of his army in heart he swooped on Dundee. As usual, it was swift work, the more desperately done because once again a flag of truce was dishonoured. The enemy left all, and for a whole day Colkitto and his troops repeated the orgies of Aberdeen.

In the night, with his men scattered, riotous and in drink, word reached Montrose that Baillie and Hurry combined were within a mile of him with three thousand foot and near a thousand horse. For defence he had but seven hundred musketeers and eight score horse, mostly inefficient from wine. By every law of war he was done for. What was he to do?

"I'm advised to abandon all and run for it," he told Colkitto. "What think you?"

"That I would have the knave's throat cut who gave the advice," answered Alastair promptly. He came to the conference lurching and red eyed; the need of action promptly sobered him.

"Since the advice is not taken the throat may rest," said Montrose. "Are the men fit to march?"

"As fit as men overcome with wine and revel may be," returned Colkitto. "Yet if we cannot fight 'tis plain we must march."

"And march quickly," said Montrose. "'Tis our own fault that we are in this plight. Let us redeem the error. Sound the assembly at once. Dundee must not be a trap for the taking of the king's troops."

He went himself in search of the revellers, rousing, pleading, encouraging, soothing the wild, helping the drunken by wedging them between soberer comrades for support.

"Ay, ay," said one of the staggerers thickly, seeing who it was that held him on his feet, "lead on, my lord, lead on to perdition if ye like and we follow."

"Nay, nay, my good man," returned Montrose pleasantly, "not to perdition but out of it. Baillie must not catch us here."

"Baillie," repeated the man, drawing himself up in

an infinite scorn. "Him that sat girning and spitting at the Isla. As I live, your lordship must let us fight the man."

"To be sure, to be sure," assented Montrose, "but not among these crooked streets where a brave man can scarce swing his sword. Too many corners for the fellow to jouk round."

"And that's honest truth, too," said the man, and shouted to his comrades to come outside where they could get at the rascals.

As Montrose, with his reeling, dishevelled force before him, marched out by the East Port, Baillie marched in by the West. Hurry and his dragoons charged, but were foiled, and for the rest of the day hung on Montrose's rear. At night they returned with the news that James Graham and his rabble were fled eastward to the sea.

"We will drive them into it," cried General Baillie, spying glory in the enterprise. "We have but to cut them off from their mountains to have them all dead or alive." And so indeed it seemed must the issue be.

By midnight the Royalists were on the Eliot Water near Arbroath, and there Montrose halted for a council of war. "Hey, gentlemen, and that's been a stiff walk after supper," he remarked blithely. "Well, if we're to punish Baillie for his rudeness we must first return to the hills to get breath and recover ourselves. He has doubtless spread his net over us; but the night is dark."

"Your lordship means to pass his army, then?" said Keppoch.

"I mean to go through it, my dear Keppoch," was the answer. "Twere much too tedious to go round."

"Your lordship is right," observed Alastair. "Let us to the road; we have but an hour or two of darkness to go by."

So they doubled back by Panbride, Guthrie and Melgund, stealing silently as panthers through the very middle of Baillie's orce. Before he discovered the trick they had passed the Esk and were resting in the grounds of Careston Castle, the guests of Sir Alexander

Carnegie, a relative of Montrose. Having snatched a morsel of food, the men flung themselves on the ground, too weary to care how or where they lay. Sleeping with glued eyelids they could scarcely be roused by their officers' sword-points when presently the assiduous Hurry again appeared with his cavalry.

Yet when he came up they were wide enough awake to empty half a score of saddles, whereupon he judiciously withdrew to harass by rear attacks. Three days they bore the fatigue of incessant fighting and marching. In that time they stormed and sacked a fortified town, out-mancœuvred and beat off an army six times their strength, and marched sixty miles without rest, without food, without sleep save what they got at Careston Castle. On the fourth day they were in the depths of Glen Esk and safe from pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OF THE ART OF SURPRISE

ON an evening some weeks later they encamped at Auldearn, a village near the town of Nairn. Since the events of Dundee there had been a pretty game of hound and hare, racing and chasing, stroke and counter stroke. At the instigation of Argyle, Baillie took a turn by Athole, burning to his heart's content; similarly, Montrose visited Menteith and Lochearnside, making an example of the lands of Ardvoirlich. Colkitto again went west on a recruiting expedition (adding as his custom was, certain business of his own with clan Campbell); Inchbrakie went on the like errand among the lads of Athole and Strathtay, while the Lord Gordon stimulated the loyalty of his own people, regardless of his father's frown.

By the end of April all three were again with the Marquis at Skene, between the Dee and the Don, bringing handsome reinforcements. Then, too, came James Gordon, Viscount Aboyne, who broke captivity at Carlisle at the cost of a dislocated shoulder and with sixteen companions rode through the enemy's country to the Royal Standard. Montrose's heart and hopes once more bounded.

"Arms and the men," he said, viewing the warlike array proudly. "Had we but powder for our ball we were well provided."

"Perchance I know where to find it, my lord Marquis," said Aboyne slyly.

"Then it were a favour to do so, my lord Aboyne," returned Montrose.

Thereupon Aboyne, with eighty horsemen of his

own choosing, rode for Aberdeen, and the same night returned with twenty barrels of gunpowder, taken as if they were his own.

"Now," remarked Montrose cosily, "if Sir John Hurry pleases we are ready. He has lately been somewhat insolent, has he not, my lord Gordon?"

"Insolent indeed," replied Lord Gordon. "At Auchindoun, but a few days gone by, he was vauntful as the whale that swallowed Jonah. He knew not how your lordship can leap the Grampians. And since Seaforth has joined him" (the chameleon of Kintail had again changed colour and faith) "he goes with open jaws seeking to devour your humble servant."

"Grows he so ravenous?" laughed Montrose. "For a certainty then he would find my lord Gordon a hard morsel to chew. Let us see to it that the attentions are not all on one side."

Finding that, instead of being somewhere beyond the Grampians, as was fondly believed, Montrose was actually on his track, Hurry discreetly withdrew towards the Covenanting quarters of Inverness. And what with the rapid accession of Seaforth and Sutherland with their clans, plus the Frasers and Moraymen, his army was presently of such dimensions that even the victor of Inverlochy, Aberdeen, and Tippermuir was lightly esteemed. Ambition and vanity breathed their siren whisper. Could not Sir John Hurry do what had baffled all the other Covenanting Generals? Sir John Hurry would try.

Suddenly in a tempest of wind and rain he turned in his course, meaning to surprise the master of surprises. In the weeping, mist-blurred dawn the Royalist scouts galloped into an unprepared camp with word that the enemy was at hand. A moment Montrose considered with contracted brows. He had not half his opponent's strength either in foot or in horse. Prudence would, therefore, avoid a pitched battle. But behind was Baillie manœuvring for a pounce on the rear the moment Hurry should get his chance in front, the old game of hammer and anvil. So, to spoil it once again, the order was for battle.

Auldearn straggled and scrambled about a craggy ridge in the midst of hillocks and broken ground. Now as always the genius of Montrose saw precisely what was needed and did it, pressing nature herself into his service. On the right, among dykes and ditches, rocks and brushwood he set Colkitto with the Royal Standard, telling Alastair on no provocation whatever to quit that cover without orders; in the centre, as show of main battle, he placed a thin line of musketeers; and the rest of his force, foot and horse, he held in a hollow out of sight; so that Hurry in his blindness dashed upon a masked army.

As Montrose expected and intended, he sent his best troops against the Royal Standard. Unable to reach it, they taunted Colkitto with skulking in cover. "Come out, man, come out," they called, "and let us have a look at the black face of ye in the open." Mungo Campbell of Lawers, flourishing his sword at the head of his regiment, jeered with extraordinary bitterness.

"So Maccoll of the boasting sits like a foundered old wife behind fences and entrenchments," he cried, peering over a ditch head.

"Maybe ye want Maccoll out to slash the head off ye," retorted Alastair.

"The very thing I'm waiting for," rejoined Lawers in his most provoking tone.

Next minute Alastair had leaped dyke and ditch, his great sword sweeping like a scythe, his men hewing zealously behind him. The fury of the onset carried the jeerers back; but they recovered quickly, and, being five to one, surrounded Alastair and his little band. Then the Major-General saw his mistake. One glance he cast to right, to left, and rear. "It seems we are to die, my lads," he said in a low voice. "Let us die like men—on a heap of dead enemies."

In his own targe, which for size and weight was likened to the door of a tolbooth, he took pike points by the half-dozen, and slashed them off with his sword as if he were cropping thistles. All the same the valour seemed hopeless, and some one, hastening to the Marquis, whispered that Macdonald was in the open, and utterly

routed. A black shadow as of anger or vexation crossed Montrose's face ; but with a gesture for silence to the messenger he turned to Lord Gordon, that day in command of the cavalry, remarking cheerily, "Alastair Macdonald is having things all to himself on the right. Come, come, my lord Gordon, is he to carry all before him single-handed, and leave no laurel for the house of Huntly ? Charge ! "

"You hear," cried Gordon, turning to his men, his face suffused and eager. "His Excellency the Lord Marquis gives us the thing we desire. Let a tale be told of us this day. Knee to knee, as Marshal de la Force taught us to ride in Lorraine, at them and through them. Follow me."

At them and through them it was, and to and fro among them till they were like stampeded cattle.

"See you how gaily the Gordons ride ? " cried Montrose to his footmen watching the onset. "Are we to leave all the glory to the cavalry ? Come along, my lads, and let us have our share."

And as from out the earth there sprang up a host of armed men, who swept upon the foe, a tornado of yells, an avalanche of steel. But Hurry's foot were stauncher than his horse. In the shock assailed and assailants reeled together. There were great swordsmen on both sides—gladiators whose deeds were the theme of delighted bards. What were left of them had the joy of their hearts in full that day.

At the coming of Gordon and Montrose, Alastair, wounded and crimson, drove forth with new might and cut a path to Lawers.

"I have come, ye see, Mungo," he said in a kind of hoarse growl. "Have ye any message for Loch Tayside ? "

"None that I'll trouble you with," was the reply, made with as fierce a growl. "I think I'll be there as soon as you."

"It's fain ye are," said Alastair, swinging for a blow. They were in the thick of the fight, both sides pressing desperately, and a pike point caught Alastair's upraised arm. The pikeman went down ; but in the same

instant Lawers also fell, with a Royalist sword in his vitals. Alastair roared at being deprived of his prey, but he had work enough and satisfaction enough. Almost the whole of Lawers' regiment, the flower of Hurry's army, fell about the body of its chief. Loudon and Lothians' regiments, picked men of the Covenant, lay in similar heaps, and for miles the path of flight was strewn. Such was the result of Hurry's experiment in the art of surprise. With Seaforth, Sutherland, and a company of lairds he made in his discomfiture for Inverness, thence to report what had befallen him. The outlaw, James Graham, had annihilated a fourth army, twice the size of his own.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FROM DAN TO BEERSHEBA

So Hurry fared in May. Two months later, in the hot July weather, Baillie's turn came at Alford, which was as Auldearn, save in one fatal particular. Lord Gordon, that day a prince among paladins, having scattered the gallant Balcarres' cavalry, turned his attention to the Lieut.-General.

"I will pluck him from the very midst of his men," he declared, calling on the Gordons to follow. "Let us take him alive," he cried when they had cut through rank upon rank.

He was almost as good as his word, but in the very moment that his hand was on Baillie's sword-belt it relaxed suddenly, and he dropped from his saddle. A shot from a craven lying hid in an enclosure among cattle ended that brave and brilliant life. He was most amply avenged. Baillie left the field spurring for his life, with his army in heaps behind him. But the victor tasted little of the joy of victory. It seemed that with every success he gained Montrose must lose a cherished friend and helper. At Tippermuir it was Kilpont, at Inverlochy Ogilvie, at Alford young Huntly, who alone of his House was steadfast.

Montrose buried the young Gordon chief with full honour in the aisle of St. John the Evangelist, since called the Gordon aisle, in old St. Machar Church, Aberdeen, and turned to his task, heavy enough of heart despite five brilliant victories. For matters had of late gone disastrously in England. Naseby had been fought, and the power of Charles Stuart shattered. My lord, with his clear vision, saw well enough how

things were. He must make himself master of Scotland, absolutely and very quickly. That done, he would measure swords with Cromwell.

"It lies between the iron Puritan and myself," he said, beholding the English giant from afar. "Oh, that I had that thousand horse which Rupert promised me."

He had not Rupert's horse—scarcely a promise made by his friends in the south was kept—but he had his own invincible heart, his own unconquerable will and hope.

He was gladdened, too, by the enthusiasm of the north. The Celtic chiefs, after various absences on various pleas, not unconnected with the home-taking of booty, were once more at his side in warlike strength and array—Macnabs and Macleans, Macgregors from Balquidder, Macphersons from Badenoch, Farquharsons from Braemar, Clanranald and Glengarry, Alastair Macdonald, Inchbrakie, Struan and Grandtully. Airlie, too, was back, weak from fever, but ardent as ever, with Sir David Ogilvie and young Will Murray of Tullibardine, who had taken on himself the duty of seeing the Lady Kitty safely forth from Bog of Giecht. Montrose's eye kindled at this martial display of the Tartan. Here was an army to conquer Scotland with, and, please God, it should accomplish nothing less.

He coursed his hare for yet another round, tempted Baillie at Perth, at Dunkeld and elsewhere, but ever in vain, or only to insignificant skirmishes. Yet when he left a company of Irish camp followers in Methven Wood, meaning to return, Baillie's troopers issued from the garrison of Perth and put them to the sword, sparing neither young nor old. Macdonald swore a savage oath of vengeance which a thousand claymores flashing in air ratified on the instant.

"We're in Alastair's boat there," cried Glengarry, his countenance ablaze. "Let's win at the cowards who butcher helpless women-folk when the men are out of the way."

"You shall win at them," returned Montrose, his face grim and angry as any there. "Fear not, they

shall pay to the uttermost farthing for this treacherous craven deed."

In the beginning of August he led the clansmen from Dron, through Glenfarg to Kinross, to cut off a contingent of the fatlings of Fife, glanced at Stirling Castle, which he would fain make the king's again; but finding the town stricken with plague, crossed the Teith and Forth higher up, and marching by Brig of Denny to Kilsyth, halted for a reckoning.

Throughout the long summer days Estates and Kirk were extraordinarily busy recruiting, mustering, drilling, and equipping such an army as should effectually and finally crush the demon James Graham. It was now ready for action, and, in fact, was encamped within two miles of Montrose when he halted. Argyle, recovered of his hurt, and renewed in courage by such a force as it was thought his opponent could not stand against, was once more at its head. Baillie was second in command, and with him were Burleigh, Balcarres, Tullibardine, Lindsay, and Elcho, and the usual company of ministers.

For form's sake Montrose put it to his officers whether the king's troops should fight or retreat. He desired but one answer, and what he desired he got. "They are nearly two to one," he pointed out, his face nevertheless aglow with enthusiasm.

"And is that anything new, my lord?" inquired Alastair.

"Though there was thrice two to one," said John of Moidart, "yet would we desire nothing better than your lordship to lead us against them."

For a moment, and a moment only, a shadow of doubt lay on Montrose's mind, not because he feared Argyle or the numerous generals under him (he had already put them all to open shame), but because, as was common with him, he had to take more than one army into account. In themselves Argyle and his force would scarcely have cost him a second thought, but fifteen miles off were Lanark and the men of Clydesdale hastening to battle. Moreover, Eglinton, of the steel-grey face, Cassilis and Glencairn were raising the

west. Could Argyle's army be disposed of before Lanark came up? It could, and must.

Montrose made a little speech to his men, recalling their former deeds and telling them what was now to be done. "It is a hot day," he ended. "You see there is hot work before us. The lighter we are the faster we can go up the brae; strip to your shirts." And stripped to the shirt, a saffron host, the clansmen fought.

For once in a way Argyle, too, was crying, Ha, ha! among the spears, inspired by the knowledge of his own superior numbers and the flattery of his amateur tacticians. So Baillie, the working general, was informed that the Lord of Hosts had at last verily delivered the enemy into their hands, and instructed how to seize his opportunity. He had but to occupy a certain hill (pointed out to him), and the game was his own. Baillie drew his brows together in dissent.

"Think, my lord," he ventured, "that such a plan would take us directly across the enemy's front—a most perilous movement."

"Perilous?" repeated Argyle in high scorn. "Perilous. Does not James Graham lie in yonder hollow like an egg in its cup ready for cracking? Tut, tut,—forward, forward, and let the business be ended."

"If he choose to take it, then I conceive the advantage will lie with the enemy," returned Baillie, still protesting. "And with your lordship's permission I have this to say—that to lose the day will be to lose the kingdom."

"Trouble not about the kingdom," rejoined Argyle haughtily. "I will look to that."

So Baillie marched his troops, not without resentment and misgiving, across the braes and through the corn-fields as directed by the amateur captains of the Covenant. His protests were very speedily justified. For the enemy, declining to lie like an egg in its cup ready for the cracking, had anticipated his cunning exploit of moving across unseen. The points of vantage on the height whence, according to his sapient Committee of Control, he was to deal out destruction in ease and

security were already in possession of Colkitto's Highlanders.

Baillie's van topping the crest saw below them, among brushwood and enclosures, a company of crouching musketeers, and knowing no better, essayed to cut them off, a folly dearly expiated. As at Auldearn, Colkitto was told to keep in cover till he got orders to quit it, and as at Auldearn he disobeyed gloriously. It was not enough for the Celtic blood to repulse the attack. The Macleans who received and broke it must not only send the attackers right about, but pursue them in face of the whole Covenanting host.

"Ho, ro, Donald Og," Duart, their chief, shouted across to young Clanranald, "it's the fleet foot ye have, but which of us is to bring down the stag this day?"

"It's blithe ye are at the crowing, Duart," retorted young Donald, leaping to his feet. "Clanranald for ever," he cried, flourishing his sword, and called on his men not to allow their ancient rivals the Macleans to have all the glory.

Now in that tingling moment Alastair chose to believe the clansmen were not to be held, and judging that since they must needs charge it were best he should lead them, he headed the main body of Highlanders up the steep hill-side. The scrambling race had scarcely begun when Baillie, riding forward to examine Montrose's position, appeared on the brow above—to behold that strange saffron host climbing desperately towards him. Well, too well, he knew what the climb meant. Wheeling on the instant he galloped back, yelling at the regimental commanders to hurry their men forward. But before reinforcements could arrive the Highlanders were over a dyke at the top and into his advance column, scattering it like chaff.

All this Montrose watched in agony of suspense which was almost dismay, telling himself that if ever a man deserved the sharpest whip of a court-martial it was his Major-General for the madness and disobedience of imperilling the king's army. Nevertheless, it was with perfect composure he turned to Aboyne, now in his dead brother's place at the head of the Gordon

cavalry, remarking, "Alastair does it bravely, as his wont is. But methinks he were the better of some slight aid in his present adventure. See, yonder are Hurry's squadron preparing to have at him. Ride forward, Aboyne, with your Gordons, and see they are prevented."

Then, as ever, the Gordons went gaily to the charge, but they were scarcely a troop against three squadrons of cuirassiers. In the shock he saw them recoil, then recover, charge again, and again recoil. He saw also regiment upon regiment of Baillie's foot hastening to take the Highlanders in rear and flank, and though his own infantry were going forward at the double they might be too late to avert disaster. Riding to the Earl of Airlie, who was near by with the Ogilvie horsemen, he said, his face full of concern, "You see what is happening in front. The Major-General mows like a scythe-man in harvest, but the odds are too much. The Gordons also are too few to accomplish their purpose. If the Highlanders are to be alive an hour hence, they must have immediate support. Now, my lord of Airlie, the whole army looks to you as the officer best fitted to give such aid as will carry the king's troops to victory."

"Your lordship gives my old heart joy," returned Airlie promptly. "You hear, my lads," he added to his men, "the signal honour his excellency the king's general is pleased to confer upon us. Let him see this day that the Ogilvies are the men they were of old and still keep their ancient and goodly name untarnished. Sound the advance."

The trumpet blared and the Ogilvies were off, their grey-haired chief, a warrior of near three score and ten, at their head.

With a murmur of admiration Montrose turned and rode to Nathaniel Gordon and Sir William Rollock, who were in reserve with the rest of the cavalry. They, too, were in the throes of a burning impatience.

"My lord, my lord, is it not time to go?" asked Gordon, his eyes bright with excitement. "My very sword itches in its scabbard."

"It shall presently be eased of its itching, fear not," responded Montrose, his face as keen as Gordon's own.

Looking after them he saw the Ogilvies gain the upland, pause, form up, and charge, their chief still at their head, their horses stretching like greyhounds. Next minute they were in a cloud of dust, not too thick, however, to hide the heaving of the tumultuous mass or the wicked flash and sparkle of swords. The work was hot; for they fell on Balcarres and his cavalry, and Balcarres had been trained in war by Montrose himself.

"See, see," cried Gordon, his knees clenching the saddle, his face agleam with the battle light. "Eh, lord, they at it like that, and we standing idly here."

"Patience, patience," replied Montrose, his eyes still intently upward.

The dust cloud thickened, swayed to and fro, eddied as in a whirlwind, and like a whirlwind shrieked with the cries of the infuriated men, giving and receiving death. Were the combatants going to destroy each other within its obscuring folds? All at once, it spread, broke into side eddies, into fringes and tatters; the sword-blades gleamed red and clear in the sun. What Montrose had prayed for, but thought almost beyond hope, was happening. Balcarres and his cavalry, hurled back on their own foot, were breaking the ranks in mortal confusion. With an eye of lightning my lord looked at Gordon.

"It is time," he said. "Forward to the charge."

At the first thud of his galloping cavalry he was off to his reserve of infantry, tucked snugly out of sight behind a spur of the hill, under Inchbrakie and Struan. They, too, were breaking their hearts for action.

"He comes, he comes," cried Struan at sight of his general: "Heaven grant it may be for the charge."

"Amen," responded Inchbrakie fervently. "I think by his mien he means business. The advance?" he asked, stepping out as Montrose rode up.

"The advance," was the ringing answer. "Pate, Struan, Murray, get the lads into order. Atholemen

up the brae, there's great work adoin' and much glory at the top."

The Atholemen's response was such another shout as had fired his heart on the day he first went among them at Blair Castle. He had scarcely spoken when swords were out and pipes screaming, the pibroch of the Murrays contending with that of the Stewarts, and that of the Robertsons with both, while high above the din rose the voices of the officers yelling commands. Montrose himself led them up the steep slope and over the crest and down the other side into the staggering, confounded columns of Argyle.

At that fresh onset Baillie despatched gallopers to the rear to hurry up his reserve of Fife levies, and followed them furiously to have his orders the more promptly obeyed. But the noise of the gory tumult in front and the stream of wounded and terrified men were enough for the gallants of Fife, who were in flight before the gallopers could reach them. At that ignominious sight Baillie drew up, gazed a moment in rage and dismay, and then rising in his stirrups, cursed them frantically.

"Cowards, traitors," he roared, his clenched right fist in air, tears of fury and despair in his eyes. "God confound you for your treachery and poltroonery this day."

Riding distractedly back, he met Argyle making off in white, chattering terror.

"Are you satisfied, my lord?" he demanded, reining up and looking as though he would strike his chief. "Are you satisfied? See what comes of crossing an enemy's front."

"Is the day lost, then?" quavered Argyle piteously.

"Look and judge," replied Baillie. "The Fife men are off without blow struck—have them shot if you are a man. For the rest, your lordship is now free to look to the saving of the kingdom according to your word this morning." And having let loose that arrow, he rode on, shrieking orders, pleading, cursing, trying single-handed to stop a routed, panic-stricken army. He was caught and swept back by the torrent

like a swimmer in a racing sea. He would have been trampled to jelly had he resisted, for there was now no thought but to get away from the terrible blades behind. He wept as he went, struck with his sword and was struck back, none paying him respect.

Far in front his chief was exhibiting that exceeding celerity which had so often enabled him to leave the stricken field in safety if not in honour. As for the valiant captains Elcho, Burleigh, and the rest, they were flying to the four winds. Some sought refuge in Stirling Castle ; but Argyle once more took to the water like an otter, shipping from the Forth to Berwick, there to devise reasons for the Convention of Estates why Baillie lost the day.

At the end of a fourteen miles' chase Montrose and his Major-General came face to face.

"I congratulate your lordship on the greatest of all your victories," said Alastair, wiping the black sweat from his brow.

"To which Major-General Macdonald by his gross disobedience contributed most brilliantly," returned Montrose. "Kneel."

"What means your lordship?" asked Alastair, cocking his head sharply.

"That I am not to be disobeyed twice," Montrose replied, his eye twinkling. "Be pleased to kneel."

Doubtfully and unwillingly Alastair went down. Then quickly Montrose gave him the accolade.

"In the king's name," he said, so that all might hear. "Rise, Sir Alastair."

CHAPTER XXXIX

CHANGED IDOLS

ON that feat of glory tired men might well have rested a while, yet there was no thought of pause in the flashing course ; for it was hoped that certain swaggerers and braggarts in the west country would still be as good as their word and come to grips. Accordingly Montrose turned to pay his respects to the Earl of Lanark, and so requite the double-dealing Hamilton and his faction for many an ill-deed done in the dark, many a poisoned word whispered behind the arras. But the news of Kilsyth outsped him, and Lanark and his Clydesdale chivalry were sought in vain.

“Faith, my lord, as apt as their master Archy Campbell himself in the prime trick of vanishing,” quoth Sir Alastair. “Since their fancy is to treat us as the deer treats the hound, by the compliment of flight, let them go, and cock we an eye at Glasgow. Mayhap it will stand, and I have heard that the stuff from its looms is the best in all our happy land, and that it has a routh of fatness besides. Knock at its gates with the musket butt, my lord.”

But before Alastair’s advice could be taken the provost and bailies were forth in fawning gladness to congratulate my lord on his crowning victory, acclaim his right, and in the king’s name entreat him to enter and take peaceable possession of the town. Montrose assented joyously.

“Gentlemen,” he answered them, “it gratifies me to meet you thus : for in good truth it would go clean against my heart to put your ancient and Royal burgh

to the inconvenience of siege and assault. Your petition is granted."

At that the Major-General gloomed with an ugly contraction of the craggy brows. "It should be stormed and sacked as befits its deeds," he remarked to Moidart and the other chiefs privily. "Look you, now, how these bowing, beeking praters work upon the Marquis. Does supple tongue and back do it, then? Faugh! words, words, words, when the sword ought to be out and busy. See you if there be not an order forthwith that no hand of ours is to be laid on web, napery, silver-ware, or other gear which the rogues hoard and keep from their betters."

"And if so, Alastair?" asked Moidart, his head cocked meaningly.

"Why, if so," returned Alastair, looking round the circle of intent faces, "then will it behove us all to think over the business and ask ourselves this question: Did we put our lives and fortunes to hazard, did we slash off heads and get our brogues full of blood, just that a when peching bailies and greasy websters, who are of our colour just while the fashion lasts and not a minute longer, may sit in ease and security under the protection of our arms, with never a plack to pay for their past rogueries? How like you the thing?"

"Ill, Alastair, extraordinary ill," returned Glengarry. "If the Marquis withhold his hand and bid us withhold ours when the harvest is rich and ripe, why then, look you, we may as well be going back to our glens."

"It's my honest opinion, Glengarry," said Alastair, "that a Glasgow bailie's tongue will turn aside the sharpest of your swords, and leave the barns and the byres empty that ought to be full. Watch and see. If I am right we will speak of the matter again."

He was right. Instead of punishment or reprisal, there was punctilious courtesy, a too open and manifest goodwill, nay, as it seemed to the dark-browed, high-chinned chiefs, a weak and fantastic desire to please and protect at all costs.

"Ye would think," growled Alastair in his beard,

"that these sooty Glasgow cadgers and weavers are the very men who won for his Excellency the six battles at our back."

"I have no mind of seeing them at Inverlochy or Kilsyth, Alastair," said Moidart.

"Inverlochy or Kilsyth," repeated Alastair in scorn. "Man Ian, it's fine at the fun ye are. Inverlochy and Kilsyth, heh! Let but a blast of the Campbell pipes come down on the wind, and it's as brave as a brock making for his hole every man of them would be."

Colkitto and the chiefs would have made the avenging hand heavy and the plunder sure. It may be they were right; it may be my lord was wrong in thinking craven hearts were really to be won by chivalry. Certainly in the effort to make friends for the king his chivalry became quixotic.

It had ever been a part of his creed, most strictly observed, not to quarter his troops on the king's friends. Hence he now made his leaguer at Bothwell, eight miles distant, leaving the astonished citizens of Glasgow a guard under this strict order—that the man who put forth his hand to plunder should pay the penalty of disobedience with his life. He had not reached his leaguer when word followed him that his order was already disregarded. He rode back in anger to find that three of his soldiers had been taken in the act. "Bring out a shooting file," he said to the officer in command. Macdonald protested openly, almost rudely; but Montrose was not to be turned aside. "I have said it, Sir Alastair," he replied. "We must have discipline," and the delinquents were shot in sight of the assembled force.

Macdonald rode to Bothwell by his chief's side, outwardly civil, inwardly full of a raging resentment. Three men shot to please a pack of Glasgow rebels, and worse still, the Major-General's word unheeded.

"We will see," said Alastair to himself, "what comes of this." More was to come of it than even he could foresee.

His ire was lulled for a little while by the incense paid to conquerors. For to the leaguer at Bothwell

came trooping a great multitude of penitent lords and lairds, tripping and shouldering each other in their eagerness to do homage. Alastair's eyes gleamed. Ay, truly there was a wondrous magic in victory. But yesterday these princelings, now prostrating themselves, would have flouted and jeered from their castles. It was a sweet sight to see them on their marrow bones. Alastair paid scant heed to their vows ; but the prostrate attitude and the cringing mien gave him something of the delectable thrill of kingship.

He took a swift turn presently into the south-west in search of Eglinton, Cassilis, and Glencairn, and had everywhere the reception of a victor. With a delicious sense of irony he supped at Loudon Castle, and stretched himself in the Chancellor's chair, my lady beaming on him graciously after an embrace.

"Ha, ha," cried Alastair, viewing the grandeur and the servility with a mighty satisfaction. "Ha, ha ! what would my lord the Chancellor say to this ?"

"Hath not the Chancellor a pickle sense and wisdom ? returned my lady demurely. "It is ill pleased he would be were he to find that Sir Alastair Macdonald had been at Loudon Castle and was denied the courtesies that are his due."

"Heyday," thought Alastair, smiling enigmatically, "have I got into the land of Canaan by mistake ? Never tasted I such milk and honey before." He went off laden with gifts for himself, and escorting a special courier carrying my lady's tokens of loyalty to the Marquis.

"How found you things, Macdonald ?" Montrose asked with some eagerness, as soon as he had a quiet moment.

"I found everything that my heart could desire, except the enemy," answered Alastair. "Open doors, full larders, a country ringing with your lordship's praise, and heaping curses on its late idol, our dear friend Archibald of Argyle. Eh ! my lord, what a down-come hath been there ! For the rest, I have but to report your lordship has made good the word you sent to his Majesty after the little affair of In-

verlochy. You have conquered in very truth from Dan to Beersheba, which is to say, that in all broad Scotland there is not left a rebel-rogue who dares to lift his head. I fear me things will grow heavy and tedious for lack of a foe."

"Methinks his Majesty would rejoice in the tedium," returned Montrose. "Come, Sir Alastair, I have a word to speak to the troops."

Thereupon, in the ears of the whole army he extolled the abilities and services of the Major-General, attributing their victories, as was right, in no small measure to his skill and prowess. Alastair, perhaps expecting something of the kind, made the appropriate response, calling on the clans to cheer the leader of their heart and choice. Then Montrose made a great banquet, partly in honour of liberated friends come to camp, for the victory of Kilsyth had flung open the prison doors, partly in honour of Sir Alastair, whose goodwill was still essential.

The sun went down on a festive and seemingly absolute unity; it rose again on a division which wrung Montrose's heart as it had scarcely been wrung in the whole course of difficulty and war.

"Since the work is done and done so well," Alastair said to him in the morning, "some of us may as well be going home for a space."

Montrose was dumbfounded, "Why, Sir Alastair, he returned, every feature showing his amazement, "the work is not yet done. I have here his Majesty's express instructions to wait for him at the border. We will then march into England, there to do as we have done in Scotland."

"When his Majesty is ready we will return," answered Alastair, as if he meant but a day's absence. "Ye see, the lads have some needful business at home. Crops will ripen and rot, my lord, and other things get out of gear by neglect—and Moidart, Glengarry, and other Highland gentlemen desire me to lead them. It will be best, my lord, for then will they be back the quicker."

So once again, and in the very crisis of his fate, my

lord saw the pick of his army prepare to leave him. Colkitto made a fair speech professing unshaken fidelity and promising a speedy return. Why was it that his words sounded like a knell in my lord's ears? All the western clans and many Stewarts and Robertsons went with him; but Inchbrakie, Struan, Stewart of Grandtully, young Murray of Tullibardine, with Rollock and Nathaniel Gordon, remained. When the sound of Colkitto's music grew faint, Montrose turned to them.

"This is unexpected," he remarked.

"Scarcely unexpected, my lord," responded Struan. "I liked not the look on Alastair's face when you spared Glasgow and shot three of his men."

"But you heard him promise to return with all diligence at need," Montrose rejoined.

"Pray God he may keep that promise," said Struan, as one who has little hope.

CHAPTER XL

PHILIPHAUGH

"COME to me, I have sore need of thee"; that repeated and piercing cry rang in Montrose's ear, so that he scarcely heard aught else. There were fresh honours in reward for victories gained, new commissions and what not conferring princely power—from a sovereign dodging his enemies and nowhere able to make his word good. My lord, in the greatness of his heart, would make it good for him. England should be as Scotland; ay, and Oliver, terrible as he seemed, should feel the terror of a king's wrath. "Dear heart," said my lord to himself, as in reply to that poignant, haunting cry. "Yes, yes. I will go to you and do as you would have me." How was the brave vow to be kept? Macdonald and the western clans were off, with most of the Athole and Strathtay men, and presently Aboyne begged to be allowed to take his leave—on urgent private business. Well my lord knew that the urgent business was contrived by Huntly, who grew the more bitter and jealous the more the king's cause throve. Aboyne took the Gordons with him; so that in a day, as it were, Montrose was shorn of his strength by professed friends. But there was still left what neither man nor fate could take from him, his own invincible spirit. With glowing eyes he looked round the company of lords lately come to proffer allegiance and aid, Douglas, Linlithgow, Annandale, and other powerful chiefs and barons. He would do in the lowlands what he had already done so often in the highlands, he would create a new army with which he would push southward to the king.

“My lord Marquis,” he said, addressing the Douglas, “we count much on the aid loyally offered by yourself and the other lords and barons here present. The king hath need of us all. Let him see, I pray you, that the ancient and noble houses here represented are still mindful of their honour. Do you ride home, my lord Marquis, with all possible diligence, and bring out your men ; you too, my lord Annandale. Ogilvie, you will ride with them, as one well skilled in recruiting. The army will follow speedily.”

“Thanks for that word, my lord,” returned Douglas warmly. “See you if there will not presently be such a blaze on the border as will kindle other fires to the burning out of the last foul remnants of sedition. My lord, I have but one thing to ask of you in return : tarry not. Your lordship’s presence with us were worth ten thousand men.”

“Ay, and ten to that,” cried Annandale.

“Nay, nay, my lords, ’tis too hot for flattery,” smiled Montrose. “Concerning your request that I make haste, fear not that I will delay in following you.”

His heart was high when those about him drooped. The border lords were scarcely out of sight when he was rallying Inchbrakie and Struan on the dolour of their looks.

“Why these troubled faces ? ” he cried. “Pate, one might well fancy you had just heard your fate from the doomster, man ; and you, Struan, who were wont to shame the morning sun for brightness. Wherefore this gloom ? Can it be that victory does not agree with you ? ”

“My lord,” returned Pate, “one question troubles us.”

“It shall not trouble you longer if I can rid you of it,” said Montrose. “Be pleased to give me the opportunity.”

“We are wondering within ourselves, then,” responded Pate, scratching his black poll, “if in our present condition and strength this movement to the border be a well-judged thing.”

“In our present strength and condition it were

ludicrous, my good cousin," replied Montrose. "But we go to better our condition and increase our strength. Are not Home, Roxborough, Traquair, and other friends waiting for us? Heard you not the brave Douglas say that the border would be in a flame at our coming? I tell you, Pate, this is to be the happy crown and consummation of all our toil. Ere I am many weeks older I dare predict I shall hear Inchbrakie and Struan laugh at their present misgivings."

To the Tweed therefore it was, to raise the border clans, join the king and fight another Kilsyth on English soil. Yet the omens were not encouraging. In the Lothians, while the troops rested to hear a sermon from my lord's chaplain, there came intelligence which gave a sudden edge to the doubts felt at Bothwell. For the red fox of Lorn, sniffing here, squinting there, was busy among the very men whom Montrose now sought to win. More ominous yet, he had sent flying messengers to Leven at Hereford; and David Leslie, Oliver's right-hand man and saviour, as some averred, at Marston Moor, was pushing northward with the Scots cavalry five thousand strong. Still my lord smiled in that gay confidence which had already wrought so many miracles. "Ay," he said, "so David Leslie is coming. Well! Digby too is coming, and his Majesty will not tarry. Rest you assured Leslie will not ride unhindered into Berwick."

Alas! for a too fond faith. As Leslie lay at Rotherham, with men and horses spent by forced marching, Charles was at Doncaster, ten miles off, on his way to Montrose with an army that could have made dog's meat of Leslie's cavalry. But Rupert was not there to lead the charge. Others unluckily were to give timid counsel. Charles listened fatefully, and David Leslie rode on unmolested.

In Strathgala my lord met Douglas and Ogilvie, sore of heart and drooping for lack of support. The courtier Traquair came in with oily professions and even a troop of horse under his son, the Lord Linton, who deserted dutifully in the hour of need.

"What tidings of my lords Roxborough and Home?"

Montrose asked in some anxiety. Almost as he put the question a distraught messenger rode into his camp with the reply. They were the prisoners of Leslie in Berwick. The colour went from my lord's face. "It cannot be," he cried almost angrily, and then as the truth was borne in upon him, "Good God ! what are the King, and Rupert, and Digby about ? Are they asleep or dead ?" Was it cowardice ? Was it lunacy ? It was Fate playing into the hands of the Furies. Next minute my lord's heart had rebounded on a wild hope and purpose. He would raise cavalry : he would meet Leslie : he would make the king victorious in spite of himself. Ah ! if Macdonald and the Highlanders were with him now ; if Aboyne had stayed with the Gordon cavalry ; if Charles, we may add, were not fated to be for ever fatuous, for ever futile and self-deceiving.

Wheeling about, Montrose encamped on the north bank of the Ettrick hard by the Harehead wood on Philiphaugh. There he entrenched his foot, himself crossing the river to Selkirk town, with his few troop of horse. All night he was engaged with despatches for the king, and half angry, half sorrowful remonstrances to Digby for the strange negligence which allowed Leslie to march northward unopposed, unmolested. The night was drizzly and thick with mist, a night for an ambush or a surprise. For that reason Montrose enjoined on his officers a particular vigilance in scouting, and hour by hour reports reached him that all was well. All well ! The Fates weaving their web in the blackness must have cackled at that report.

Having finished his writing, my lord stepped to the door, when he stood with Airlie by his side. The dawn was breaking ; they could see the dun mist rolling over and about the ghostly houses, felt its moist touch on their faces.

"My lord of Airlie," said Montrose, a little wearily as the other thought, "what may the king be about this minute ?"

"Mayhap riding northward, my lord," replied Airlie.

"God grant he ride quickly then," said Montrose.

"I would not leave the border while there was the glimmer of a chance of his coming. Yet if he were near now he would scarce find us. Look you how that mist blots out everything. If I were David Leslie methinks this would be my chance."

The words were scarcely spoken when the thick stillness was rent by the fierce outburst of trumpets.

"What is yon?" he cried, his heart pausing to listen, and then suddenly and excitedly at the spluttering of musketry, "My God, they are on us! they are on us! To horse, to horse!" Next moment every man of them was in the saddle and my lord spoke just a word. "My lords and gentlemen," he said, a strange thrill in his voice, "I have a favour to ask of you all. This may be our last ride together; if the Fates have so decreed, let it not be told the king that we rode unworthily or ingloriously. Come!"

He galloped at their head to the Mill Ford where one of Leslie's regiments awaited them. They were but six or seven score against massed squadrons ten times their number, but they went through scarcely aware of opposition. At sight of their general the infantry raised a great cheer, and Montrose responded with a charge that scattered their assailants. And again and yet again he repeated the feat. But the odds were twenty to one, and the pick of the Scottish horse at that. Leslie's army closed in. Taken in front, in flank and rear simultaneously, cut off from their own horse, enfolded by waves of steel, trampled, gashed, what could flesh and blood do? In trying to reach his foot again Montrose himself was surrounded, and desperate was the effort to secure such a prize. Perceiving his peril young Dalziel of Carnwath implored him to save himself, and being disregarded seized his bridle-rein. "For the king's sake as well as your own, my lord," said Dalziel hoarsely.

"Sir John," panted Montrose, "let go."

"Nay," was the response, "but we must save your Excellency."

"Sir John," repeated Montrose, his countenance lurid and terrible with the light of battle, "let go."

I would not sever the hand of a friend. I will reach my infantry or die."

"The infantry, my lord," some one bawled, "have been overpowered and have surrendered."

"Know you that for certain?" he asked.

"For certain, my lord, for certain," was the answer. The voice was Nathaniel Gordon's.

Montrose paused an instant, glancing at the vulturous faces that pressed in upon him. "Then, my friends," he cried, "look to yourselves, and may God aid you."

"We go with your lordship," was the chorused response. "Out, your Excellency, out. We follow." And in a last charge they cut through the enveloping host of Leslie.

CHAPTER XLI

ALONE

A pathetic instinct directed Montrose to the north. He would go to the hills where loyalty was still eager and ready ; he would bring out the clans yet again, descend on the lowlands like a tornado, and once more bring knaves and enemies to their knees. Accordingly, with Inchbrakie, Struan, and Grandtully for companions he rode to Athole.

Arrived at Blair Castle, his first thoughts were for those left behind in the enemy's hands, dear friends whose lives he would joyously purchase with his own—Lord Ogilvie, Sir William Rollock, Nathaniel Gordon, the boyish Will Murray, the gay and gallant O'Cahan.

"They must be saved," he declared, every feeling of pity and love aflame. "At all costs and hazards they must be saved ; and the tartan will do it." He sent urgent messengers to Colkitto, directing him to return immediately, bringing the western clans as promised ; at the same time he implored Aboyne to come back with the Gordon chivalry. With Alastair and the young Gordon chief by his side, he would retrieve all, and again lay Scotland as a tribute at his master's feet. But Alastair was now an independent leader, a rival in ambition and honour even to Montrose himself, with business of his own to prosecute in the west.

Therefore when Montrose called, Alastair was evasive or downright deaf. As for Aboyne, it is enough to say he was with his father, and disposed to be docile.

And while Montrose waited thus in a maddening suspense—pleading, coaxing, commanding—he heard

of his friends going one by one to the scaffold, the worst anguish of all.

The first to suffer was the brave O'Cahan, who was hanged with every mark of shame as a gala spectacle for the populace of Edinburgh. Of his unlucky Irish a battue was made, none being spared, either young or old, either male or female. Leslie was tiger enough to a foe in his power ; but he was a soldier, and would have kept the promise of quarter given on the field of battle. " It is against all law of war to put our prisoners to the sword," he told his Committee of Ministers. " They are forfeit, and must die," was the answer, and Leslie had his justification from Holy Writ. His soldiers, revolting at the work of butchers, were similarly encouraged till the fell vengeance was accomplished.

Of the women and children four score were at a single bout cast headlong over Linlithgow bridge, and thrust back if by chance they were able to scramble up the bank out of the river. Frenzy for blood ! The time was mad ; men were delirious, and the preachers of Christ's Gospel most delirious of all. Foh ! foh ! let us pass on. With his surrendered foe in heaps behind him, Leslie went westward to Glasgow, where a sederunt was held for disposing of the more notable of the captives. Argyle had planned in his privacy which should be dealt with first : for the time to wreak a hoarded vengeance was come. One forenoon Sir William Rollock was taken in, bound, to hear his doom : in the afternoon his head fell at Glasgow Cross.

The course of vengeance was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Montrose and a band of Highlanders from Athole and Lennox. He challenged Leslie, but Leslie declined battle. For a whole month my lord harassed him, hoping to sting him into fighting, hoping, too, for the return of Alastair Macdonald and Aboyne. Oh ! that they would come ere it would be too late. They did not come, wherefore Leslie and the Kirk held their prisoners fast.

At St. Andrews, whither the scene was changed, for safety or dramatic effect or both, Ogilvie, Gordon, and young Murray were selected for doom. Of them

all Ogilvie was hated the most bitterly by Argyle, and therefore his death was the most desired. But there Fate played a card of her own.

By a special stretch of mercy Ogilvie's mother, wife, and sister were admitted to his dungeon—to soothe him in a pretended illness. They were no sooner in than the lady Kitty turned with a pleading face to the jailers. "We beseech you," she said, "grant us the favour of spending a minute with my brother alone." The men looked in her wet, wistful face, and, having still some gallantry, withdrew. Then, quick as a hawk, she turned to her brother. "Jamie," she whispered excitedly, "up with you, and on with my clothes. Haste! haste!" and as he hesitated, "Quick with you. We have but a minute. Fear not for me."

When the guards returned three ladies went forth sobbing so piteously behind their handkerchiefs that even the jailers averted their eyes.

"Thank God for the wit and courage of a woman," said Ogilvie as he mounted the waiting horse outside. "Goodbye, mother; goodbye, sweetheart." And he struck spurs to his horse, scarcely drawing rein till he was again with Montrose.

As the lady Kitty lay in her dungeon—a detected culprit—listening to the Atlantic waves beating upon the walls, and wondering what her fate would be, Nathaniel Gordon went to his doom as he had so often gone to battle, exultant and without a quiver of fear. On the same day she was removed to a lodging near the Castle, and there kept under guard. Two days later, as she sat musing, her ear caught the rumble of a cart in the street outside her prison. She flew to the window, and saw what she dreaded to see—young Murray of Tullibardine bound like a felon for execution. She cried out despairingly at the sight; he turned his head, looked up, and smiled. Rough hands were upon her, and she was pulled back. But they could not rob her of that last fond look of the brave young face. Suddenly she lifted her clasped hands to heaven. "Gracious God," she cried, "sustain him in this hour. I would I were with him."

Her jailer reproved her roughly. "Tush! tush! madam," he said. "You know not what you ask or for whom you pray."

She looked at him with flashing, angry eyes, but instantly turned away. She would not sully her love or her hero by speaking of them to such a man.

While my lord pondered these things with a burning, agonised heart, a yet worse blow befell him. The king had thrown himself on the mercy of the Covenant, and was in Leven's camp—a prisoner. Next came an order to disband. My lord was nearly shooting the messenger as a traitor and liar. But alas! the letter was in the king's own hand. Montrose sent a piercing remonstrance; the king responded with a cry of helplessness and a repeated order to disband; for Argyle and Loudon were now his counsellors. The final command came as Montrose rested a space on the Water of Islay with a company of his faithful Atholemen. For them he made terms; for himself the sentence was banishment. On bended knee Inchbrakie and Struan entreated to be allowed to share his fortunes, but of that he would not hear.

"Nay," he answered them fondly; "because I sink it were ill done to take you down with me. Go home, attend to your own affairs, which I know are in grievous disorder, cherish the sentiment that has brought us here, and pray that the present madness may pass away. May the standard which we now furl be speedily spread upon the wind again, and may Athole hearts and Athole arms support it as aforetime. For your fidelity, your courage, your loving-kindness take Montrose's blessing and gratitude. And now, friends, dear friends, for ever-loved and remembered, leave me."

"Let the pipers play a Coronach," said Struan. "For this day are our hearts rent and our lives made desolate."

"Nay, not a Coronach, Struan," Montrose begged of him; "not a Coronach. Neither let there be sound of drum, but rather go silently, as having no music-fit for the occasion."

And silently and with bowed heads they went, my

lord turning away that he should not see that heart-breaking sight—the last of the king's troops dispersing in obedience to the dictate of Argyle. Neither did they cast any eye backward. But presently my lord turned again, and looked long and wistfully northward. They had disappeared. He stood alone like a tree stripped by the storm and left bare and desolate.

CHAPTER XLII

FOR THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

THE flag was again unfurled ; but not in Athole. It was on the Orkneys that my lord set foot in the stupendous enterprise of restoring a fallen throne, his ardour undamped, his spirit undaunted by dreary years of exile, chicanery, treachery and fatuity. In the ecstacy of renewed action which was as the very breath of life, he thought not at all of past failures or vexations, but only of the great things that were to be.

With the faith and rapture of a child his heart leaped from the bare, bleak plains of Caithness to the blue hills above Tummel and Tay. Oh ! for the sight of the Athole tartan. Oh ! for the sound of the Cameron pibroch and the wild, fierce slogan of Clanranald, Glengarry, and the Gregarach. Please God he would see and hear and do according to his heart's desire. He would pass like a running flame to the appointed place. He would reunite the clans who were waiting to hear his voice. And the great fire kindled, it would spread and spread till the whole land was enveloped, and all that was not gold of loyalty would be burned out utterly.

With an army scarcely the strength of a modern battalion, half of it raw Orkneymen who had never so much as set eyes on a horseman armed for battle, half German and Danish mercenaries, he pushed to the reconquest of a kingdom. Madness, says the wiseacre, with a shake of the sapient head ; ay, the madness of a bounding devotion which counts nothing impossible, nor ever stays to reckon peril.

The disease is infectious, and others caught it from him. Sir John Hurry, for example, in the whirligig of time once more his comrade in arms, and Fendraught, his old opponent at Aberdeen, now also with him.

At Corbiesdale, on the borders of Ross, they paid the price of their madness. To Archibald Strachan, lieutenant-colonel of horse under Leslie, fell the honour of laying the trap into which they walked as blind men walk over a precipice. The trap had but to close on its prey. Charge upon charge of ambushed cavalry from every point simultaneously upon surprised, undisciplined troops; what could the effect be but destruction swift and terrible? Swift and terrible it was as soul of enemy could wish.

My lord saw the king's banner with the bleeding head on the ground of black, trampled under foot by victorious foes; he saw his own, the pure white damask bearing the motto, "*Nil Medium*," share the same fate; he saw the Orkney men fly before the terror of the reaching swords, without blow struck; he saw his friends fall by his side; and his desire was to fall with them. Did something tell him that here in this lonely spot, this miserable scuffle of an ambuscade, the end was come? Perhaps. At any rate he fought to die. His horse was killed under him, and he fought on foot, pressing where the swords were thickest. But the last mercy of a soldier's death was not to be his.

Seeing him covered with blood, Fendraught (himself in the same condition) leaped to the ground. "Mount, my lord," he cried, holding the stirrup. "Mount and save yourself."

My lord turned a fearful countenance. "No folly, Fendraught," he replied. "My place is where I am." But Sir John Hurry coming up in the swirl, added his voice to Fendraught's. "For the king's sake," he said huskily, for he was sorely out of breath. "For the king's sake. Save yourself, my lord, and you will save us all."

A trooper's sword was in the air for his life; Hurry struck the man down.

"See you what they would be at," said the Major-General. "As you love us, out of this. And haste, haste ere it be too late."

That appeal sufficed. Without a word Montrose leaped into the saddle and struck spurs to his horse. As he slashed his way out the dusk was falling. The night was quickly upon him. Among the crags a mile off, being unable to ride for the roughness of the way, he dismounted and set his horse free; then in the blackness of darkness wandered on, knowing not whither he went.

Eight and forty hours afterwards a famished, footsore, wounded, dead-weary man, in the garb of a peasant, arrived at Ardvreck, the castle of Neil MacLeod of Assynt. It was night, and on learning that a stranger of rueful appearance stood at his door desiring to speak with him, Neil hastened forth torch in hand.

"Who comes thus seeking me when honest folk are in bed?" he asked, flashing his light over the forlorn figure.

"One who would fain hope he is not so sorely changed that his old friend MacLeod of Assynt does not know him," was the answer.

"God above us," cried MacLeod in sudden excitement. "It is the Marquis himself. How is it your lordship comes in such poor guise?"

"Have you, then, not yet heard of Corbiesdale?" asked Montrose.

"A whisper, just a whisper," returned MacLeod.

"A whisper speeds ill news with as swift a wing as a bawling from the house top," said Montrose. "Corbiesdale is my reason for this appearance. By the way I met an honest fellow of a shepherd who not only obliged me with his clothes in exchange for mine, but directed me hither."

"And I keep you standing at the doorstep," cried MacLeod, as if smitten with self-reproach. "A bonnie hospitality to a friend in need. Come in by, my lord; come in by."

With that he led the way into the house, the blood throbbing and singing in his ears so that he could scarcely keep his feet for giddiness. For he knew all about Corbiesdale, and had already discussed with his lady the great price set on the fugitive's head—enough to make a poor man rich. And—and behold the unsuspecting fugitive under his roof.

He made a great show of kindness, though his wife was inclined to silence, being watchful and calculating.

"I little thought, my lord, that my poor Castle of Ardvreck was to be thus honoured to-night," he remarked beamingly as they supped together. "And whither is your lordship bound now?"

"To my garrison in Caithness," Montrose answered readily, never doubting the sincerity or friendship of his host. "And right glad and grateful I am for this heartening, refreshing hospitality by the way."

He was too weary from fatigue, too far spent from wounds to mark the gleam of greed and gloating which came into MacLeod's face. Though Assynt was but a youth, his age being some two and twenty, he was old in craft and greedy as Judas for gain. His head was even now light with the thought of his prize. My lord's was light from other causes, yet already he had recovered a measure of his old gaiety.

"This is something of a change since we were at Inverness together," he said, glancing comically at his own singular attire. "Good days they were, MacLeod. Good days."

"Ay, my lord, good enough days," MacLeod owned in a queer voice. "But they are past."

"And this day will pass, too," said Montrose, "and another and a brighter shine forth. Loyalty is not yet dead, nor like to die."

MacLeod said nothing, but with an unsteady hand poured out wine for his guest. My lord drank a little, toasting the lady of Assynt, who bowed stiffly and sourly. As he laid the cup down MacLeod rose somewhat hurriedly and left the room. Next minute he was back with two of his men, darksome, lowering fellows,

who shuffled in half furtively, half insolently, with eyes fast on the Marquis.

"It is not fitting your lordship should be without due honour in the Castle of Assynt," MacLeod explained. "These servants of mine will wait on your lordship and presently attend you to your chamber."

"It is needless," responded Montrose with a flickering smile. "Believe me I have of late been well schooled in the art of being my own servant."

"I would not have the king's general so demean himself in Ardvreck," rejoined MacLeod with sinister courtesy. "Your lordship is under a great load of weariness. If it please you, these fellows will now light you to your chamber."

Montrose got to his feet, he was scarcely able to stand for weakness, and with courtly grace bade the lady "good-night." As he turned away she looked at her husband, the look of the tigress over her prey. Outside the door Montrose halted in surprise. "Why, here is some droll mistake," he said, turning to MacLeod with a smile. "Your men are conducting me to the cellars below."

MacLeod made a noise as if mouth and throat were dry-baked, flushed deeply, and looked furtively at his wife. "I would the lodgings were better," he said, "but 'tis all I can offer."

"I trouble you," said Montrose apologetically. "Think not of a chamber for me. A chair makes a fine resting-place, and indeed will suit most admirably, seeing that I must be off by peep of day."

With that he made as though to return to the apartment he had just left; but one of the men stepping instantly forward barred his way. "Why, MacLeod," he cried, crushing down a terrible suspicion, "what have we here? Methinks this too attentive hospitality were fitter for a prisoner than a guest."

MacLeod's cruel, crafty eyes dropped. "Your lordship's bed has been made ready down below," he responded sullenly.

"Manifestly my coming is untimely," said Montrose, like one who would apologize for an intrusion. "More

than once it has been my misfortune to cause my friends an inconvenience I would fain spare them. Luckily in this instance the remedy is at hand. Finding myself marvellously refreshed by the refection your goodness has furnished I will even now pursue my way."

"No," returned MacLeod, his face lurid and devilish, "you cannot do that!"

"Cannot?" repeated Montrose, with a note of amazement.

"Cannot," said MacLeod, the vulture becoming plainer and plainer in his face.

"How long is this play to be spun out, Neil?" broke in his wife. "You dally and fool too much."

A little shiver of cold went to my lord's vitals. As in the flash of a mirror he saw the whole diabolical design, understood the care and pains taken to secure him. Yet there was no blenching.

"It seems," he said with the composure which never forsook him in the fieriest crisis, "it seems that in seeking the house of a friend I have found that of an enemy. Yet I cannot believe that MacLeod too is false. You will think better of this."

"I have thought of it all I am like to think," was the retort.

"Then by what authority, sir, do you detain the king's officer against his will when he is about the king's business?" Montrose demanded, his mien stern and imperious.

MacLeod laughed brutally. "David Leslie and my lord of Argyle will answer you there," he said, throwing off all disguise.

"I did not think," said Montrose, looking him full in his shifty eyes, "that MacLeod of Assynt would make his hands foul with the price of blood."

"It has more than once been your lot to be wrong, my lord," was the sneering, shameless response.

"Then in his own castle MacLeod betrays the friend who came to him in need," said Montrose sadly. "I would he struck me dead instead."

“In his own castle MacLeod does what seems to him good,” was the cruel rejoinder. “Your quarters are below. Off with him !” he added, “off with him !” The men seized him roughly, and with a tragic look of reproach at his betrayer, Montrose disappeared.

CHAPTER XLIII

A DOUBLE SPECTACLE

ON an afternoon two weeks later, while the May sun shone peacefully on green field and steeped city, a vast and excited throng assembled at the Water Gate near by Holyrood, as though for some spectacle of surpassing interest and moment. The provost and bailies were there in their robes, with the city guard grim for grim business, and a yet grimmer individual in gruesome livery who stood silently and a little apart—the city executioner.

The event which had brought them together was indeed such as no eye in all the buzzing, close-packed mass had ever beheld. For my lord was that day making his entry into the capital with such guards of honour, such ceremonious attention from the ruling powers as had never before been accorded to any man of the age.

By four of the clock he reached the Water Gate, the cynosure of ten thousand eyes, and the provost immediately stepping forward, not without trepidation, handed him a document, the City's address of welcome, the sentence already pronounced by his triumphant and exulting foes.

As he read it the surging multitude watched breathlessly, first in curiosity, then in amazement, then in awe. For he read with serene face and quiet eyes, looking as one who endures the Cross with gladness. He was not disturbed. Why should he be? Already he had taken leave of hope; fear he never knew.

A great sigh of sympathy arose; the magistrates looked round uneasily; the guard stood closer. Were

those who came to revile staying to bless ? Would he steal the hearts of the people in the very moment of his enemies' triumph ? Looking up when he had read, he bowed to the gentlemen in robes.

"I am sorry for your condition," blurted the provost, touched it may be with compassion or contrition.

"I am sorry to be the object of your pity," was the lofty response.

His quick eye had already perceived a cart of mean description, half concealed behind the guard. The hangman, now taking upon him his office of master of the ceremonies, brought it forward, ordering my lord to get in. He obeyed with alacrity, despite the stiffness of his wounds, and sat as instructed on the chair placed for him.

"Uncover," said his keeper ; and as my lord declined : "Refusest, eh ? Then I will uncover for thee," and plucked the bonnet from his head. That done he was bound fast with ropes, his arms being pinioned by his side. This ignominy was decreed so that when the people should stone him, as they were incited and expected to do, in token of their abhorrence, he could not use his hands to save his face. But the people did not stone ; instead, they murmured in pity and admiration.

Chained in couples, the other prisoners went through the seething streets, my lord following in his cart, with the hangman for outrider. Opposite the Lady Home's Lodging, otherwise Moray House in the Canongate, the cart stopped. Sounds of laughter and revelry came from above ; for the son of Argyle had newly married the daughter of the Earl of Moray and the wedding festivities were at their height. At the word that my lord was passing the Marquis of Argyle stepped forth upon the balcony to enjoy in public the exquisite gratification of beholding his fallen rival in the hands of the hangman. Lorn stood beside him, jesting with his bride concerning this timely and apposite spectacle furnished for their wedding entertainment. Close by too was the Lady Jean Gordon, Countess of Haddington, daughter of Huntly, niece of Argyle, a Jezebel in the

venom of her wickedness. "See, my lord of Argyle," she cried with an insolent laugh, "this is what I do to James Graham," and in view of all she spat on the captive below. The people roared for shame, calling on her to come down and get the reward of her deeds, her reputation being none of the sweetest. My lord looked up and caught the eye, not of the shameless Jean Gordon, but of Archibald Campbell, who paled to the lips and shrank behind his curtain.

"Ay, well you may slink out of sight, my lord," some one cried, embodying the general sentiment. "These seven years you have been afraid to look him in the face, and you are afraid now."

"On with you," commanded the captain of the guard. "On with you, they will be trying a rescue next."

At the city wall, that is the Nether Bow Port, my lord saw the instrument of his doom rising ominously under its black cloth. He neither blenched nor averted his eyes, but looked at it composedly, even as he had looked at Argyle a minute before. He had shuddered to the heart but once, and that was not over the prospect of his own end. Weary and fordone he entered the dark portals of the Tolbooth, after four hours' procession, to be immediately pounced on by the inquisitors of the Covenant.

"I beseech you give me a little peace," he pleaded. "For in truth I have found the ceremonies and compliments of this day somewhat tedious."

He pleaded in vain. They were about him like hornets. Their mission was not peace: but a sword. Though already sentenced he must appear at the bar of Parliament, and to the surprise of all and the scandal of not a few he went dressed as for a fête. For when man failed the fond heart of woman contrived to send, as token that he was not wholly deserted in his hour of tragedy, a gift of almost regal apparel. Wherefore he went to meet his mortal enemy, Loudon, in a costly suit of black laced with silver, a rich, scarlet cloak, silk carnation stockings, with garters and shoe-rosettes of the like colour. He heard Loudon's revilings and sentence, repeated that nothing might be wanting to his humilia-

tion, made his dignified, eloquent protest, and returned to the Tolbooth—to be comforted by Mr. Robert Baillie, Mr. Mungo Law and others, a dreary, dreary ministry. He turned away from them. What use to argue or answer any more? And at that sign of contumacy (as they construed it) they waxed the more bitter. Once when Mungo Law surpassed all his fellows, my lord said wearily, like one who has endured the worst, “Rail on, Rabshakeh; rail on.”

“Unrepentant wretch!” screamed Mungo. “Oh! thou miserable abandoned sinner!”

Montrose looked in the flaming face steadily. “One there was who came to save sinners,” he answered quietly. “In this hour my trust is in Him.”

Thus passed two days and nights of unremitting torture. On the third morning he awoke from a momentary sleep with a start. Drums were beating; trumpets clanging. Was he again at the head of his clans? A look brought his spirit back.

“What means that noise?” he asked his jailer.

“’Tis to keep order and stave off malignants for an event ye wot of,” was the answer.

“Am I still, then, a terror to them?” smiled Montrose. “Well, we will array ourselves for that event you speak of.”

He was in the midst of his toilet when there entered his cell that malicious minion of Argyle, Johnston of Warriston.

“Ah!” he cried in great heart. “Methinks James Graham takes needless care with his locks to-day.”

“It happens,” returned Montrose, never pausing in his operations, “that James Graham’s head is yet his own, for which reason he will to-day dress and deck it as pleaseth himself. To-morrow Warriston and others may do with it as they will.”

“Still the high, proud stomach,” said Warriston. “It seems the Marquis of Montrose will never learn humility.”

“Doubtless,” rejoined my lord, “it were fitter in many eyes that the Marquis of Montrose should be cringed on his marrow bones suing for pardon. Only a Warriston

is saint enough for such meekness and penitence. Well, his opportunity may come ; and then I pray he may have better comforters than mine. And now it were a grace to be rid of your presence. I would prepare to die in peace."

"In faith we learn manners," laughed Warriston. "But never yet saw I any man so careful of a head which is to be his own for so short a while. I marked the gala dress in the Parliament House yesterday. Tut, 'tis dancing in a comedy we are." And on that derisive note, took his leave.

At two in the afternoon my lord stepped from the Tolbooth door, glanced round the concourse of waiting people, and then with a rapt expression turned his face upward to the blue May sky. He was dressed as he had been in the Parliament House, though, if possible, with more niceness and delicacy, and walked to the Mercat Cross by St. Giles with an easy foot and a high, noble mien. Sobs of pity, murmurs of sympathy rose as he passed. In all the dense ranks there was no face of any friend he knew ; but there were wet faces, adoring faces, ay, and angry faces, and behind these, arms itching to strike for him through the double row of halberdiers. For the hero in his hour of ordeal and doom was not unworthy of his fame. Those who looked on him understood the marvellous tales of his deeds and his bearing, tales that had seemed fabulous enough to be the invention of some wild Oriental imagination. There was nothing fabulous in them now.

At the Mercat Cross, when the book of his deeds written by Mr. George Wishart, his friend and chaplain, was brought as an abominable, polluted, and accursed thing to be bound about his neck, he smiled as in joy.

"Suffer me, my good fellow," he said to the hangman politely, and tied the cord himself. "I am much beholden to you all for this," he added, looking round the ministers and magistrates. "Never was a greater honour conferred upon me."

The rich scarlet cloak was torn from his back ; the

silver-laced beaver from his head. He would fain have kept his hat on for the final act; but submitted quietly.

"Proceed, I pray," he said. "Bate not a jot of the shame you would inflict upon me." Then turning to him who was to do the last office, he added quite cheerfully, "Come, I am ready."

EPILOGUE

"I live and die for Loyaltie." The great vow had been kept; kept, alas! with a lie on the dying lips, the lie of a devotion that would see nothing mean or despicable in its idol. With his last breath my lord praised and blessed his king; and his king had denied and forsaken him.

It may be that in the midst of his debaucheries Charles Stuart was pricked by the memory of his own perfidy and treachery in sending the most devoted, the most chivalrous of his servants to death. At any rate, the people of Edinburgh were commanded to assemble for another pageant, the greatest they had ever seen. From the four airts the scattered limbs were gathered; the desecrated body was lifted reverently from its pit among the felons on the Borough Muir, the head taken down piously by the hand of a Graham, from its trinket-prick on the front of the Tolbooth. The heart they did not find; for love had taken possession of it long before. In the blackness and secrecy of midnight the dishonoured grave under the common gibbet was opened, and the heart taken thence. Tenderly, lovingly, it was wrapped in a sheet of fine white linen with costly pearling or lace, and tasselled like a pall, the work of fond feminine hands bathed in tears, and embalmed and encased, was preserved as a sacred relic.

Four months the collected fragments lay in state that the whole people might do them reverence. Then with a pomp and ceremonial befitting majesty itself they were borne from the Abbey Church of Holyrood to the Church of St. Giles, where the gorgeous tomb

remains to this day. Fourteen of the proudest earls in the land, among them Eglinton, Aboyne, and Tullibardine, carried the coffin, a dozen of noble birth sustained the pall, and all officialdom attended in mourning robes.

As "the great Marquis"—great now in the estimation of every man—went down to his last rest, train-bands volleyed and artillery crashed a farewell.

By the grave-side stood two men with drooped heads and very singular thoughts, Patrick Graham of Inchbrakie, Black Pate of the battles, and his friend through good report and ill, the Tutor of Struan. As the Castle guns boomed they looked at each other meaningly, well-knowing who should hear that thunder. And, in fact, in the very moment that they thus exchanged looks of intelligence, a prisoner in the Castle, lying under sentence of death, started up as in fright, asking his jailer what the cannonading meant. It was Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyle. Before Inchbrakie and Struan went back to their hills they saw his head fixed on the very trinket-prick from which Montrose's had just been removed in honour.

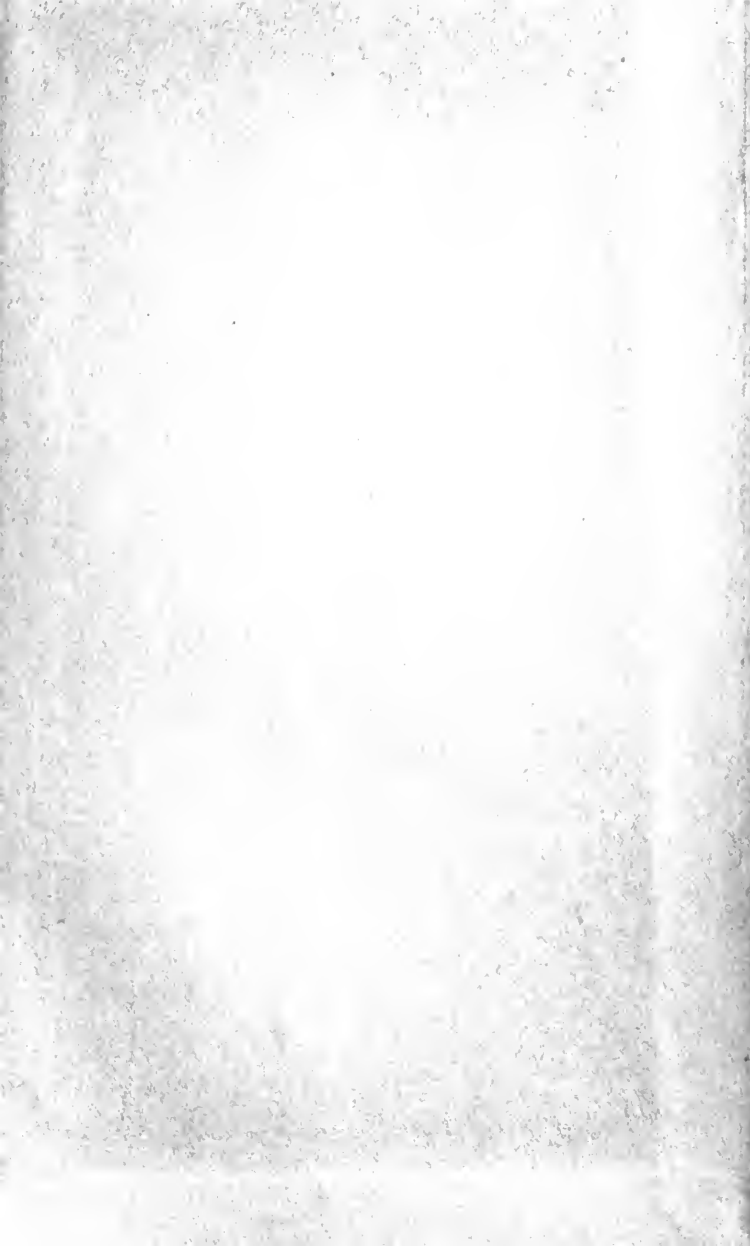
"Time's irony and revenge," said Inchbrakie musingly, as he looked up. "Justice, tardy but sure."

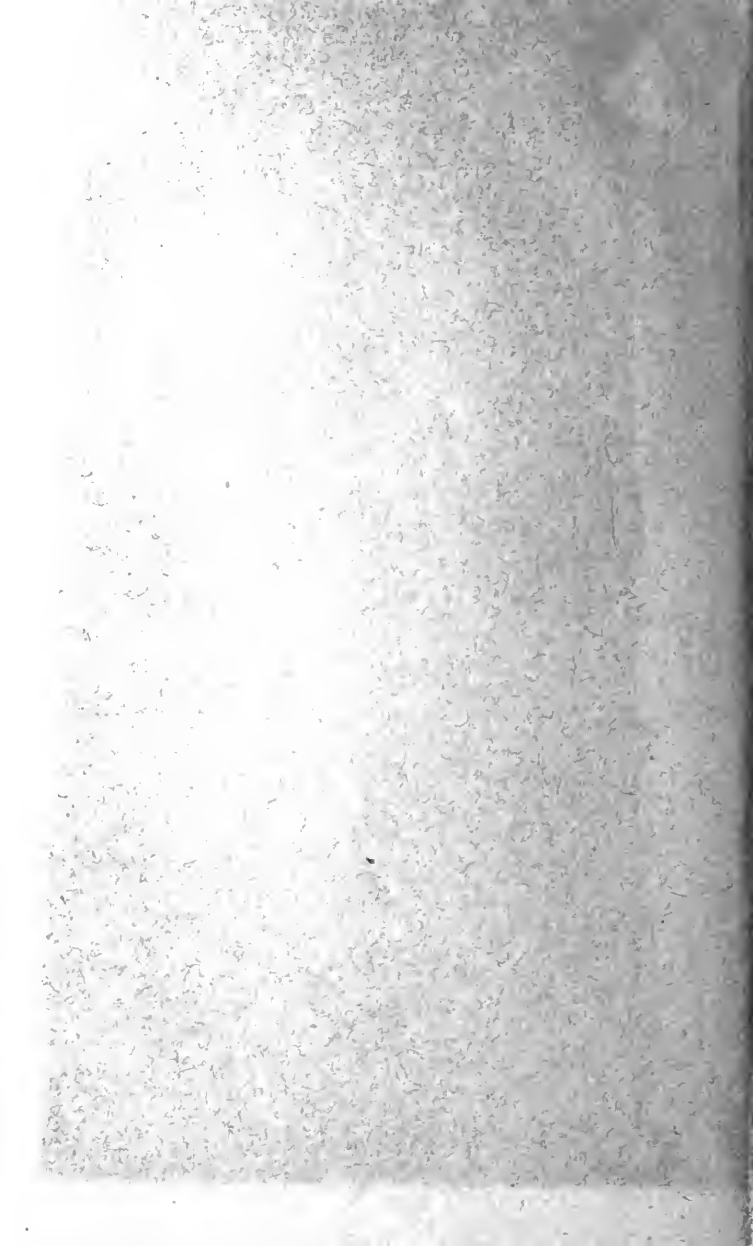
"I have heard the Marquis say," remarked Struan, "that in the end Destiny requites the requiter. It is even so, as our eyes see. Come, Pate, let us go home."

And they turned northward.

THE END







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